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THE  
LION IN THE PATH.



THE  
LION IN THE PATH

An Historical Romance.

BY

THE AUTHORS OF "ABEL DRAKE'S WIFE"  
AND "GIDEON'S ROCK."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:  
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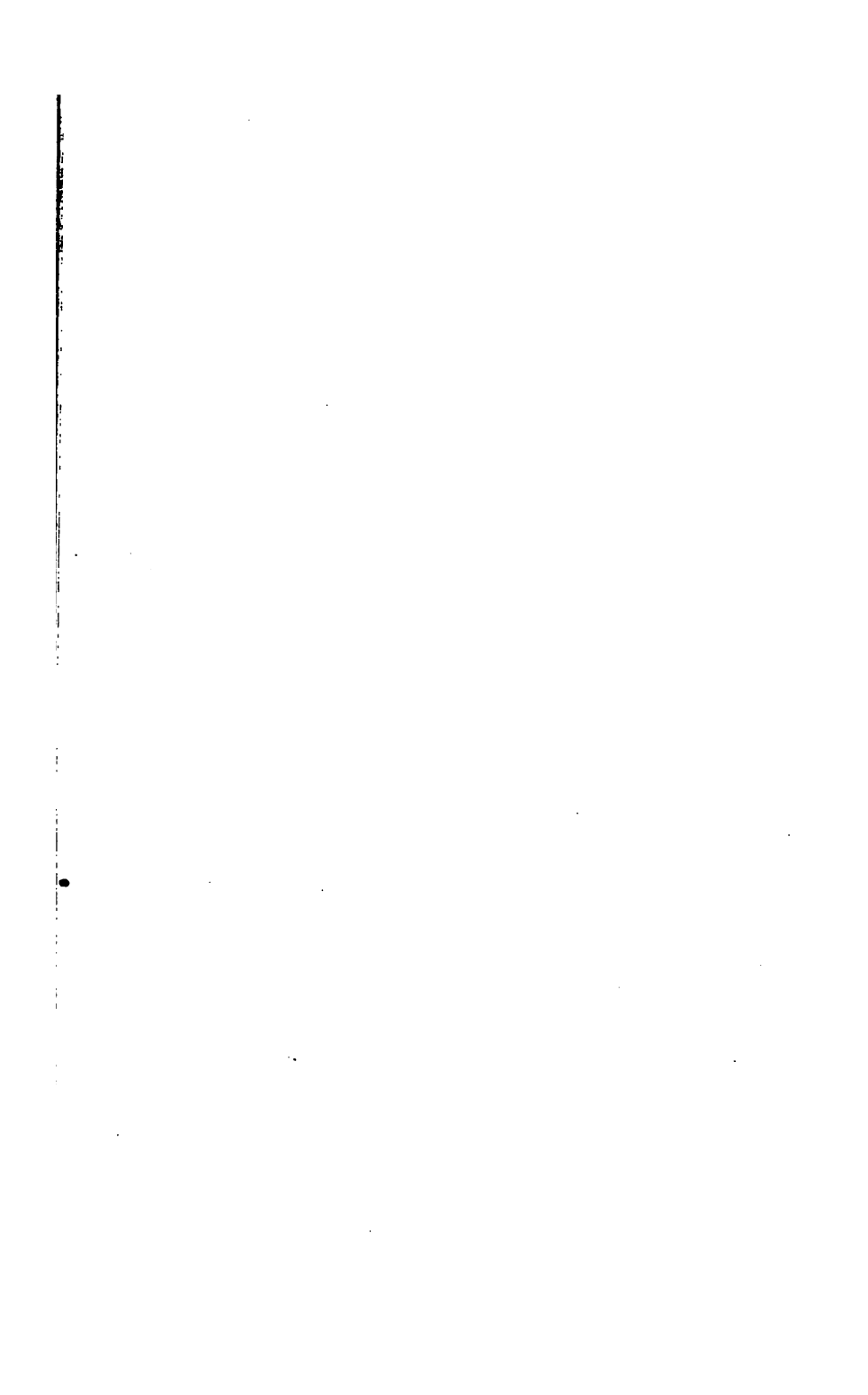
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THE Authors have to acknowledge their obligations to Lord Macaulay's History for the suggestion of the incident (the Child-Marriage) on which the present work is founded ; and also for much of the fact-material used in it.

It can be hardly necessary to add that it has formed no part of their plan to adhere rigidly to historic details.



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# THE LION IN THE PATH.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE BROKEN COIN.

ON a certain morning towards the close of the reign of Charles the Second, a marriage of a remarkable character was solemnised with strict privacy in the chapel of Leigh Court, Yorkshire.

In those days that long white palace-like structure, with all the fair glade on which it stood, was in the possession of the Earl of Bridgeminster, the father of the bride. In those days, too, the chapel, built for the Roman Catholic service, was a Protestant one; and the Earl kept to officiate therein a good old Protestant chaplain, who, when he rose on the morning of the marriage, knew nothing of what was to take place two hours later.

It had not been a difficult thing to keep even the idea of the marriage unsuspected, as there were no

marriageable members of the family, neither had there been any visitors recently at Leigh Court. But just as the great bell of the distant village church sounded nine o'clock, a carriage and four horses, heavily laden with trunks, drove furiously into the court-yard, and there disappeared from the gaze of the wondering chaplain. At the same moment a note, evidently prepared beforehand, was handed to him by the earl's valet; which, in the plainest and briefest fashion, enjoined absolute secrecy; bade him be ready in the chapel for a marriage, which would take place the moment breakfast was over; and indicated, rather than directly explained, who were to be the bride and bridegroom.

Under these circumstances, it was not strange that the chaplain should find himself deprived of all appetite, by news so unexpected and so bewildering.

He sat looking out at the bright parterres beyond the terrace, with its vases and statues; and his moistened eye followed with affectionate wonder and consternation the figure of the most childish and unconcerned bride-elect he had ever beheld: a bride just eleven years old.

All *she* knew was, that she was to be parted from her dearest playmate for an indefinite number of years as soon as this mysterious ceremony, of which

she had just been told for the first time, should be over ; and that she was selecting him flowers for a bouquet as a parting gift.

Meantime the bridegroom, who had not yet reached his fifteenth year, but looked older through a certain staidness and gravity that sat becomingly upon his fine features, was standing bareheaded on the terrace steps. He stood just below the earl, and his father, the Honourable James Langton, the only son of Viscount Langton. Between these, a pace or two behind, was seen the eminent dignitary of the Church, who had arrived with James Langton and his son, and who was to officiate at the marriage.

The old chaplain, glancing at them from the window, could do nothing but repeat the same unconscious routine, of taking off his glasses, rubbing them on his surplice, and putting them on again, uttering the while little half-smothered ejaculations of amused and pitying surprise.

The odour of the garden flowers is overpowered by the scent of hay, for the Leigh lawns and more distant meadows are cut ; and, as an excuse for getting rid of prying eyes, all the men-servants, and many of the maids, have been despatched early to help with the hay-making.

The little bride is not allowed to gather the flowers herself lest she should soil her white



silk robe, or her dimpled hands. She only points out to her nurse those that please her eye, and hovers dreamily by the bright beds, like a little flower queen among her subjects.

Unlike the brown-eyed bridegroom, who stands trailing the azure feather of his hat upon the terrace steps, the little Lady Hermia looks even younger than her actual age. Her golden hair is rather short, and simply parted and smoothed. Her perfect face, with all its latent intelligence, wears a look of infantine trust and simplicity.

The chaplain can see as he watches her, that the mere fact of her father, mother, and nurse countenancing what is to take place, leaves the child's heart easy and happy, and without care concerning it. It was only the sight of the travelling carriage at the side-door that sent sadness into her blue eyes, and into the attitudes of her little wand-like figure, as it flitted by the flower-beds.

While the chaplain glanced from one child to the other, for he could think of them in no other light, and kept muttering, "Dear me! dear me!"—while his eyes moistened and winked, he was suddenly called to duty.

In a few minutes he found himself in the chapel, standing behind and overshadowed by the great Church dignitary, both waiting, with James Langton and his son, the arrival of the youthful bride.

They soon saw her entering, cheerily enough, between her father and mother, to whom she kept glancing with wondering but contented looks.

Obediently and readily she assumed her place at the beautiful altar; transferring now her gently inquiring and trustful eyes from her father and mother to the bridegroom; who met them with grave half-smiles; and a manly dignity that seemed to fill her with admiration and reliance.

She only once lost courage, and became suspicious that all was not quite right. In turning incessantly her head round on her fair little neck, to stare with pleased and proud surprise at the great personages honouring with such attention herself and her playmate, she caught sight suddenly of a tear on her mother's cheek. With the speed of a startled hare she darted to her side, and caught her arm, crying out, "Mamma! Why do you cry?"

Her mother, startled in her turn, and confused, soothed her with assurances that she only did so because she was so happy in what was to take place. And then the little lady was led back, hanging her head, and blushing at her own misconduct, but quite reassured.

During the rest of the service she behaved with a sweetness of restraint, so unconscious and fresh, as to touch every heart there; and make them for the first time think more of the results of the

marriage to the children themselves, than of those political motives for which it had been planned and solemnised. Even the bride's father, and the author of the whole scheme,—a man yet imperfectly known, but who was soon to prove the wildest and most unscrupulous of intriguers,—even he found himself for the moment forgetting his dreams of aggrandisement; and speculating with unwonted interest on the tastes, thoughts, feelings, and instincts of his child-daughter, now so soon to be a wife.

She listened with breathless delight, with eyes wide and wondering, and lips apart, to all her bridegroom was made to say to her; turning to see if she should not find her own admiration reflected on the grave faces around.

When her turn came to speak, it was impossible to help smiling at the eagerness with which she tried to understand what was expected of her, and to say it like a lesson with the most distinct sweetness and clearness.

When all was over, and they were told to kiss each other and bid good-bye, they did so with a solemnity and awe that made some lips smile, and some eyes fill with bright and falling drops.

Half-an-hour later the old chaplain thought, as he sat at the window again, and saw the travelling carriage winding away through the fine landscape and disappear, and heard the laughter and gossip

of the haymakers returning, that he must have dreamed it all.

The little Lady Hermia was also at the window, watching with dimmed vision the place where the carriage had been last seen and lost; comforting herself by rubbing against her cheek the half of the gold coin which her bridegroom had broken and divided between them as a little marriage rite of their own. None but themselves knew how sacred the marriage was to their childish souls.

Nearly fourteen years have since passed away, and taken with them one king to death, and another into exile, while William the Third reigns in their place.

Fourteen years have come and gone, and the halves of that broken coin and their owners have never met since that memorable June morning.

Rather than they should ever meet, the earl, who had brought about the marriage, would himself have run his sword through the honest heart that had received his child's troth that morning with a joy and solemnity beyond his years. Why was this? Merely that the politician had changed sides, and in doing so betrayed the friend who had trusted him.

But, on a certain evening in the fourteenth year after their marriage and separation, there came,

under peculiar and favouring circumstances to the exiled man, one of those deep and strong resolves, that, in a nature like his, seem to have power to defy and turn the fates themselves. On the night and in the hour when it was fully formed, the little half-coins were divided by many hundreds of miles of land and sea.

One was still at Leigh Court; where all the white house shone in the moonlight like a lovely spectral palace that would vanish at sunrise.

Within, there was silence—deep and unbroken; without, there was the eloquent murmur of a ripening harvest; the murmur of orchard trees brushing together softly, as if in fear of bruising their rich burdens, and of corn-fields shivering as with dreams of the sickle.

Overlooking the western garden was a little terrace, where every night, when the weather was fair, a solitary figure came, as it comes to-night, to sit by the terrace wall, with its coloured coats of arms and its busts in sunken niches, of the long line of the Bridgeminster family. It is a woman's figure, with large queenly arms, and great eyes that seem always to look beyond the boundaries of these fair lands for something they can never find.

Round her neck is a cord of plaited silks, doubtless the work of her own fingers, to which hangs the half of a tiny gold coin. To-night the cord is

twisted round those fingers, the coin is in her hand, and her eyes gaze on it with a passionate intensity, as though they strive to read in it the story of the hidden years.

Ripe fruits fall in the fragrant darkness, and she shudders at the sound.

The odours of dying roses steal up towards her, and her face sickens of their smell.

The seething of the rich corn is heard on the breeze, and the white grand arms are stretched forth yearningly in the darkness, as if to catch at the robes of summer, thus rustling and preparing to depart.

Year after year have they been thus stretched forth, as if to hold back Time—wrestling with him in soul as Jacob wrestled with the angel—demanding by way of blessing that the desire of that solitary heart shall be gratified.

But still year after year the fruit has rotted and dropped, the roses told the same sickening tale, the corn been bound into sheaves, and borne away.

Year after year has she sunk down upon the wall, and cried, in unendurable anguish of soul, as she cries now,—

“Father of Mercies! when will this end? My husband! Must I live, must I die like this! Oh, no! You *will* come! But when—when?”

The other half of the coin was at the same moment in Rome.

Amid the crowds that were then thronging the nave of the sublimest of earthly edifices, St. Peter's at Rome—amid the splendours by which the Roman Catholic Church strives to give to its celebration of divine service a foretaste of the heaven to which it thus points the way—amid the light, the perfumes from swinging censers, and the thrilling yet majestic tones of the glorious organ—there knelt, at a time of high festival, a man of noble air, and bronzed aspect, but still young, whose rapt attitude betokened some great exaltation of spirit.

His eyes gaze ecstatically towards the high altar, where it stands between those four stupendous pillars that support, at a vast altitude, the overhanging dome—that wondrous canopy—which looks as if the audacious architect had striven to vie in thought with the Divine Artificer of the world, and His arching expanse of sky, by making this canopy also cover a world, the world of the Roman Catholic communion, which the marvellous structure seems almost capable of enclosing.

Towards the high altar, under the dome, are the man's eyes steadfastly directed with a passionate gaze; one in which his whole heart, soul, and sense are involved. And then, while he thinks he is being filled with the (to him) ineffable holiness and

mystery of the mass, there is a sudden blank before his vision ; and priests, lights, and crowds—the high altar, and the gigantic cross with its sad burden—all pass away, and he sees in their place an English picture :—

A small chapel, with vaulted and groined roof of the most delicate and graceful architecture—the chapel of a magnificent mansion, standing amid lordly oaks, the growth of six hundred years, on the banks of one of the most picturesque of the Yorkshire rivers, just where it widens into a great lake.

The scene lives before him. The scent of the new-mown hay comes through the painted windows of the dream-chapel. The white silk of the little wedding robe glimmers. The dimpled hands flush faintly like blush roses in the early morning light. The wondering, sweet, infantine looks bewilder him, and draw his sorrowful lips into smiles ; while hers, the baby lips, lifted solemnly for his kiss, pout before him.

“Is it all a dream ?” he asks himself, as his hand glides under the coverings of his breast to feel for the half of that broken coin, where it ever lies, against his heart.

“Was that my wife ? Is it possible that I have never seen her since ? That, if we met, we might not even know each other ! My God ! where will all this end ?”



As the words burst from him on voiceless breath, his half-unconscious but most profound pity and sympathy for his wife's position (so much more hopeless even than his own) affected him very strangely. It seemed to call forth from the very deepest recesses of his being an instinct that she, too, might at that moment be crying, with still greater despair, "When? When?" He could even half fancy he really heard his own sad words echoed by her.

It was at that moment the resolve came.

He had risen in the tumult of his thoughts, while all about him continued to kneel. Now he bent again to his knees, when all else were rising, and he said almost audibly,—

"When—sayest thou, Hermia, my soul's darling—when? *Now!* Though death confront me on the English shore, though there be a raging lion in every path that leads to my own dear home and to thee, I tell thee, Hermia, it shall be now—now! Let thy father and brother do their worst, if they discover me, and give me up to my enemies: I will dare all—ay, all for thy sake!"


## CHAPTER II.

### STRICTLY PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL.

Soon after the visit to St. Peter's of General Viscount Langton (for such was the rank of the personage in question, his father, then viscount, having lately died), a distinguished member of the English Government received a letter, marked on the outside conspicuously with the words "Strictly private and confidential."

These words, and the rest of the superscription, were written in a feminine hand of a peculiarly delicate and, so to speak, youthful-looking character; yet exhibiting, withal, a dash of boldness and vivacity in the flourishes that arrested attention, and suggested the writer was no commonplace person.

While the noble recipient held the letter doubtfully poised in his fingers, as if wondering what on earth it could be about, or whom from, the scent of violets came gently stealing up to his nostrils. Remembering his mature years, his grave habits,



and dignified position, he began to laugh, as he said to himself,—

“Flowers and love messages, eh? For my son, I suppose; to whom my obliging correspondent has already handed over my title, by way of anticipation. Gently, mistress, gently!”

The laugh suddenly stops. Never, surely, did man’s countenance exhibit a more abrupt and harsh transition than his now, from light and genial glow to darkness and intense bitterness of feeling, when having broken the seal and spread out the broad sheet of thick gilt-edged paper, he read as follows:—

ROME, *September 7th, 1695.*

MY LORD,

I hope you will pardon this intrusion as motives of respect and duty alone induce me to address you. I am here, as perhaps your lordship may know, in the service of the Sect. Dept. of the Secretary’s Office, and have the honour to enjoy the confidence of the chief, Mr. Speke. I have lately had some singular and mightily important opportunities—but I must not trouble your lordship or forget my *official* position, so pass on to say—it has come to my knowledge that there are some singular private relations between your lordship and the Jacobite gentleman calling himself General Viscount Langton; a very distinguished officer, who was wounded in the service of the King of France, but is now able to move about. He has been ordered to travel for the benefit of his health and spirits, both of which have been sorely shaken by his wound, and the death of his father. The talk is he came to Rome to spend his remaining leisure before rejoining the army.

My lord, I have reason now to know that he, all of a sudden, has changed his plans in a very mysterious fashion, and is about venturing secretly to England. His motives—which do not seem

to be political—your lordship, perhaps, can guess. The nature of your lordship's interest is quite unknown to *me*, and I would not be so audacious as to conjecture ; and *the step I have taken I have not allowed any person whatever to know of, and nobody shall know.*

I do hope I have given no offence to your honourable lordship, when I am only anxious to please, and that your excellency will see if I have erred it has been through over much zeal. Besides, I am very young, and quite friendless. My whole dependence is on Mr. Speke, who would take my post from me, if he knew what I had done.

I have the great honour to subscribe myself, your lordship's most humble servant to command,

MARY MODENA PRESTON.

To the Right Hon. the Earl of Bridgeminster.

Did the fair writer, and zealous member of the Secretary's Secret Department suppose she was writing to a friend or an enemy of the General Langton she wrote about ? Probably, that was the exact fact she could not be sure of ; so she carefully called the person in question, not the "rebel," but only, with delicate tact, the "Jacobite gentleman."

Could she have seen the earl as he read her letter, she would not have been long in doubt.

It would, indeed, have been an interesting study for an unsuspected eye-witness to watch the behaviour of the earl for an hour or more after the receipt of this letter—to see his alternate fits of calm musing and of angry passionate stalkings to and fro the whole length of his library—his abrupt

stops in the midst of his walks—his hurried examination of papers in his cabinet, when some thought struck him—his pause at the handle of the bell two or three several times, as if about to take some serious and possibly irrevocable step, and each time finally leaving the handle of the bell untouched.

But at last his looks and attitude became calm, stern, concentrated: thought had done its work, and it was time for action.

His first step seemed very embarrassing. He had determined to answer Mistress Preston's letter; yet, in doing so, he had carefully to guard his own dignity in dealing with a spy, and in so clandestine a fashion; and, above all, to take care that she should not be able to make any serious use of his letter under the temptations to which she might be exposed, as a young, possibly beautiful, woman placed in exceedingly equivocal circumstances. 4,

The Earl of Bridgeminster has received Mary Modena Preston's letter, and though he might, under other circumstances, severely condemn the breach of official rules, he cannot, in consideration of her youth, inexperience, and amiable motives, consent to injure her by divulging her extremely improper step.

The earl will be glad to hear of her welfare, etc., and to help her to promotion if she justifies him in so doing. He sends her, on account of the trouble she has taken, and the great expense she must have incurred in sending a special messenger, a bank note for £50.

Should Mistress Preston discover she has been *mistaken* in attributing General Langton's proposed visit exclusively to private motives, *as the earl is strongly inclined to believe*, that fact would, of course, be communicated instantly to her chief; and she would find a reward exceeding her utmost wishes for her aid in making known to the Government so serious and timely a discovery respecting so dangerous and disloyal a man. The earl *himself* would, in that case, be glad to have the *earliest possible intimation*.

The earl paused after he had written thus far, as if doubting whether he might not venture a step further in revealing his intense desire to know before any one else—even before her own chief—the supposed news. But he put down his pen, as he said,—


“No; she's evidently no fool. She'll see the value to herself of pleasing me, and what would be my pleasure must be evident. Now then to wait—how long, I wonder?—for fresh news from Rome.”

## CHAPTER III.

### AN EXILED KING.

THE General's first step was to make certain preparations which involved lengthened visits to Lyons and Brussels, and occupied several weeks. Then he hurried away to Paris, which he passed through without delaying to make a single call; and went straight on to the noble palace that had been placed at the service of James the Second some few years before; when that unhappy monarch and his queen had separately taken flight from England, and arrived by different routes, and on different days, to the place of their future residence.

How all the circumstances of that noble reception came back upon the General's mind as he approached St. Germain's! He, as yet known only as the son of his father, had gone with the latter amid a most superb suite, comprising the whole French court, that accompanied Louis on his way to meet and welcome the exiled queen, who was the first to arrive.



Never, perhaps, before did state magnificence assume so tender, so chivalrous, or so hospitable an aspect. The splendour of the royal chariot with its Swiss halberdiers at the sides; the spirit-stirring clamour of the cymbals and trumpets; the seemingly endless procession of carriages, drawn each by six horses, within which sat, says Lord Macaulay, "the most superb aristocracy of Europe, all feathers, ribands, jewels, and embroidery;"—these things did not seem to the young man so much the display by a great king of the glory that surrounded him, as the natural and fitting manifestation of his kingly sympathy with the royal fugitives; who, while suffering from calamities greater than it is possible for the world often to witness, found themselves raised even to a more exalted pinnacle of honour, as Louis bowed himself and his people before them; when, on hearing of the approach of the desolate queen, he alighted, went to meet her, and would not listen to the passionate expressions of gratitude in which the poor lady's heart strove to find relief.

"Madam," said Louis, in words that young Langton was near enough to overhear, "it is but a melancholy service I am rendering you to-day. I hope that I may be able hereafter to render you services greater and more pleasing."

As General Langton once more pondered over



words that seemed so full of significance and of hope for his own legitimate sovereign, he could not but remember that Louis had already more than justified his words by the help rendered to James in his Irish expedition—which had ended so disastrously—and that the French king might well feel excused from repeating the attempt. And, under those circumstances, he could not but ask himself whether James's own followers would be justified in breaking their present state of inaction.

He had now reached a spot from whence the whole magnificence of the palace of St. Germain's was displayed before him. It stood in the midst of stately woods, and on the verge of a vast forest, which abounded with beasts of chase. Erected on the brow of a hill, it had below, in the foreground, all the winding valley and river of the Seine, while in the distance could be dimly seen the turrets and spires of Paris. Conspicuous among the immense mass of the palace buildings rose the castle built by Francis the First; and the magnificent terrace which Henry the Fourth began—and which Louis, its present owner, had completed, while also adding several stately pavilions.

How the General's heart smote him as he paused to gaze on the long terrace line; and, while recalling his late unpatriotic thoughts, also remembered the last time he had walked there with the

king's hand on his shoulder, listening to a most confidential conversation between the king and his father, only a few weeks after the flight from England, and the death of his aged grandfather. Then it was that his own fate had been decided—he was to enter the service of the King of France, and to be kept aloof from the enterprises already meditated for the recovery of the crown ; in the hope that, if they failed, he might, at some future day, take up the business from a new point of vantage—that of rank and reputation in the French army—to give new force to his position and character as a member of one of the most distinguished of the noble families of England, while personally one of the most devoted and loyal of Jacobite gentlemen.

These advantages are now his. Does he wish to use them? He is surprised to find that for the first time the heartfelt loyalty, the eager desire for action, that ever before were accustomed to spring up in his breast at the mere thought of such efforts, seem now to be dying, if not already dead.

Ah, well, he thought, he was fit but for one thing at a time ; that he supposed was the explanation. Patriotism must slumber awhile, and let love try its chance. He hoped the king would not perplex him with questions that he might not reply to. This secret must not be told even to him, at least not yet.

1

From our present stand-point of national peace and security, does it not seem a little startling to remember that less than two centuries ago there was not only one king of England in England, but another king of England in Paris,—James the Second; who was driven away by the Revolution of 1688, in favour of William of Nassau, Prince of Orange, our William the Third?

And of the two rival monarchs—he who held real sway, and he who only ruled an ideal kingdom—we are not sure but that it was the latter who exacted most rigidly from his diminutive suite of faithful followers the greatest deference and honour.

So, when it was intimated to His Majesty at St. Germain's that a certain person, whose father (lately deceased) had been one of the most vigorous and able of the Jacobite adherents, was about to venture on a secret visit to England, without any previous request for the royal permission, or without asking for the royal counsel as to the adventure, there was a great flutter among the courtiers, and many murmurs as to what the person in question might be about to do.

“Offer to tell all our secrets, most likely, if only they will pardon him, and restore him to his estates and honours!” said one voice aloud, that of Sir George Charter, taking courage from the general discontent.

"Fie, fie ! Sir George !" remonstrated the king ; but in a tone of such very gentle severity, as almost to invite other and similar suggestions.

Suddenly there was heard the sound of the great bell in the court-yard, giving warning of a visitor.

"Hush, gentlemen ; it is *he* ; Do not forget that his coming here now, even at the eleventh hour, is so far in his favour that we are bound to guard ourselves carefully from showing any doubts—I mean any premature doubts."

Then, turning towards a tall, imposing-looking man, his chief adviser, the Marquis of Burfield, who had been hitherto silent and contemplative, the king added,—

"What say you, my lord marquis ? May he not be coming to us—ungrateful that we are !—to show us it is in our interest he goes on so critical and dangerous an expedition ; and that it is his prudence that has made him guard his secret so jealously to the last moment ?" He paused a moment, then resumed his speech :—

"Yes ; I think I understand. Out of our late grief for the loss of our beloved daughter—the usurper's wife—General Langton has seen that heaven itself may be intending to draw balm for godly and loyal hearts. He has seen in the tears of the nation a new rainbow of hope for our troubled country. He knows, he cannot but know, that the

death of Mary has assuredly set free the hearts and hands of thousands of loyal English gentlemen; who, while she lived, were disposed to submit to the usurper for her sake.

"Depend upon it, it is this that has stirred him to action, in the spirit of his most noble father; and the alleged private motives are a mere blind to guard him, and lessen his danger if caught."

"Pardon me, sire," responded the nobleman, "I think not. I have had a few words with him, and I believe his business is of a strictly private nature. But I have faith, your majesty, in the fidelity of General Langton; and I venture to think that if—if your majesty would condescend directly to ask him to——"

The courtier paused. The king looked grave. Perhaps he did not like the responsibility of putting the son into new danger so soon after the death of the father, who had sacrificed everything in his cause. Or, perhaps, he was too proud to ask for that which he was accustomed to see offered at the faintest hint of the royal pleasure. After a pause, he drew the chief courtier aside, and said to him in low tones,—

"Will you, my lord, step behind the curtain yonder to note what passes, and dismiss for the day those who are here assembled?"

The courtier bowed, but waited to say,—

“Will your majesty permit me, for reasons there is no time to explain now, but which your majesty will divine, to bring with me to the recess there, behind the curtain, a promising young English-woman I have just made acquaintance with, devoted to the cause, of extraordinary beauty, and very poor; will your majesty permit me to let her see him, that she may be able thenceforward to recognise him, should I desire her to do so, when in England, whither I propose to send her in your majesty’s service?”

“What is her name?” asked the king.

“Mary Modena Preston, your majesty, though she commonly goes by the name of Maria.”

“Mary Modena? The name of our queen.”

“Yes, sire, given to Mistress Preston expressly in remembrance of and honour to her majesty, so she seemed proud to tell me.”

“That sounds well. But mind, no accidents with her, my lord, to compromise our dignity by making us appear before General Langton as a party to her concealment in such a place! We could never forgive that!”

“Depend upon me, sire.”

“Quick, then, and cause one of our suite, before you dismiss them, to go and conduct the General with every mark of honour to our presence, and then *instantly* to leave us alone with him.”

The royal speaker retired to a kind of throne—a large gilded armchair, elevated on a dais—surmounted by a crown, and standing under a canopy of crimson velvet, with heavy gold embroideries. He seated himself, and drew around him, as if for warmth in the exceptionally chill day, a purple robe bordered with snowy fur, and, so sitting, looked “every inch a king.” And thus he waited in dignified patience.

Any one who has cast even a casual glance at Gibbons' statue of James the Second, hidden away at Whitehall, as if we were all ashamed of the monarch, while so proud of the excellence of the sculptor, cannot but have noticed there, besides the lineaments and dignity befitting a king, and the hard ruthless expression peculiar to the man, something a little inscrutable. One can easily fancy him to have been thus delineated in the artist's first sketch while saying, “I will make no concession. My father [Charles the First] made concessions, and he was beheaded.” It was James's fixed rule never to acknowledge an error: but then, how could a king by right divine be supposed to err? His manner is said to have been cold, and the reverse of ingratiating; but the statement must be taken with reservations. He had an imperfection in his speech, to which he was sensitive; but, on the

other hand, he had some idea of kingly grace ; and studied how he could personally influence the more important of the men who were brought into contact with him. His habits and success in this way led to the use of a by-word—the king had “ closeted ” such and such a person. He was above middle height, with limbs robust and well-proportioned ; the face long, the complexion fair, and not in itself unpleasing, if only the darker and more sinister emotions were for the time absent from it.

Such was the man of whom, as Duke of York, Andrew Maxwell wrote prophetically :—

With the Turk in his head and the Pope in his heart,  
Father Patrick's disciple will make England smart.  
If he e'er be king, I know Britain's doom—  
We must all to a stake, or be converts to Rome.

James has been king, has tried the policy so graphically described, has sent bishops wholesale to the Tower, and himself been sent out of the country. As Britain declined to accept the poet's doom, James had, with the aid of France, raised the banner of civil war in Ireland, and been defeated by sea and land, at La Hogue, and on the banks of the Boyne.

And now the unhappy monarch, after a time of depression, is reviving ; but has something else to think of beside the Pope and the mortifications of



La Trappe, whence he has lately come ; for the death of his daughter Mary, a few months before, has re-opened, so he thinks, the way back to that Whitehall he so ignominiously left.

The new comer presently entered, following the courtier who had been sent to lead him into the royal presence ; the two bowing several times with deep reverences as they approached, till they were within a very short distance of the daïs ; the king, meanwhile, as a mark of unusual honour to his visitor, not only standing up to receive him, but, advancing, when the young soldier would have knelt, to take his hand, and arrest the motion saying,—

“ No, my lord ; we forbid ! Kneel not to us. Who and what are we ? A sort of ‘mockery king of snow!’ ” And the monarch glanced, with a sad smile, at the ermined robe he wore, and at the vases filled with white roses (the darling emblem or “favour” of the Jacobites), which were freshly placed on the palace tables every morning. “ Yes, my lord, a ‘mockery king of snow’ was our unfortunate predecessor, Richard the Second, to use the words of our own noble and loyal poet, Shakespeare ; and a ‘mockery king of snow’ we, too, seemingly, must be content to remain ! Well, we bend in dutiful submission, if this indeed be the final decree of Heaven.”

After a deep pause, he added,—

“And so you are going on private business to England?”

“Yes, sire, private business too long delayed. But while my father lived I was under a sacred promise, made to my dear mother on her death-bed, never to leave him for such an enterprise.”

“And must I, my dear young friend—I who am, I trust, a kind of father to all my people—must I see you go, possibly to captivity, possibly to death on the scaffold, and feel you have no mission—can have none of a private nature—worthy such tremendous risks?”

A red spot burned on the young man's cheek, but he only bent his head a little, in deference, and said nothing.

“My lord,” continued the king, warmly, but in a tone of marked familiarity and confidence, “I will no longer beat about the bush with you, I am just now in great and special need of the hand, heart, and brain of a true servant. I hear on all hands that my daughter's death has opened the way for me back to the throne of my ancestors. But I will not willingly expose my faithful and loving subjects to butchery. No, my lord, we must not uselessly sacrifice the flower of the nobility, gentry, and people. Therefore it is I now want to test the temper and views of my English subjects; now that the loss of

his queen and the usurper's own extreme unpopularity—even with Protestants—creates for us so great an opportunity. I want to know, by personal communication with a few persons—scarcely three dozen in number altogether—all Englishmen, and some of them Protestants (for they dishonour me who say I wish to be a sectarian king!)—I want, I say, to know through some man who has a clear, unsophisticated eye—who has not been mixed up with our intrigues and conspiracies—a man of an honest soul, and of a courageous, determined heart—whether I may now let loose in a holy cause the dogs of war; or whether I must, towards the close of life, give back my dignities to God, and say to him, ‘They are no longer in men’s respect!’ That is what I want. Oh, my lord, dare I think I have so devoted a servant in you that this thing will be done—this priceless and inestimable last service be rendered to your unhappy king and father?”

The king had once more risen to his feet; and the soldier rose too, in profound agitation.

Hermia! His child-bride! Could he already forget his vow in the cathedral? Yet, if not, could he hope to accomplish both objects?

He could not answer that suddenly, but his instinct half warned him that it was not possible. Each task was in itself so delicate, so difficult, and the two were so absolutely opposed to each other,

that he knew very well that all the energy of his soul should be given but to one only.

While the refusal was ready at his lip, and he was only waiting to shape it into the least offensive words, one look at the deposed and fallen monarch, heir of a long line of kings—standing before him in an attitude of proud humility, of haughty yet sad expectance, prepared even for the humiliation of a refusal from one of his own seemingly devoted followers—one look changed the mind and instantly fixed the decision of the chivalrous soldier. In almost joyous emotion, that rose above the broken tones which revealed the internal conflict and trouble, he said,—

“Sire, if it happen that I unconsciously now ruin my own private cause by accepting so noble a mission, I do accept it; and gratefully thank your majesty inasmuch as that you esteem me worthy of such a task.”

“You crown me king once more!” said the royal lips. “And if, my lord, we ever do come to our own again, believe me, there is no position, no honour in the royal gift that you may not claim, in addition to our life-long gratitude, and the prayers and blessings of millions yet unborn.”

“But, sire,” began the soldier, after a little pause (and the king could not but notice the abrupt and remarkable change of tone, and the constraint under

which he spoke), "your words to-day render it vital to my honour and to my future peace of mind that—I—should—should indicate to your majesty what they mean for me. Sire, I am your faithful subject, loyal to the heart's core; but—I have a country that must be saved, even when those awful calamities overwhelm us that carry kings and dynasties down the abyss into a common ruin."

It was on the king's cheek that the angry spot now burned, and burned almost vindictively. The soldier went on,—

"The business, sire, I was about to engage in had no relation—at least, no necessary relation—to worldly interests of any kind."

"Ah, yes, I understand," said the king, with a feeble attempt at a smile. "Some tenderer matter, eh?"

"If, now, sire, I postpone that dear and sacred task until I have fulfilled your majesty's behest (as I fear I must, to be quite sure I can fulfil it)—if, sire, I do with stern sincerity of soul what you wish me, and finally have to say, 'All is lost, sire, save honour——'"

"Ay, then, my lord? what then?" demanded the king, in a harsh voice, and with figure erect and lofty, in spite of age and infirmities.

"Why, then, sire—but I beg your majesty—ay, on my knees—to forgive me the inevitable boldness

of my speech—then, sire, my country has claims upon me I dare not disregard ; and I shall hold myself fully justified in offering my sword to him who was and is a usurper in my eyes, but whom I dare not any longer treat as a usurper, if the men to whom you send me are themselves avowedly or tacitly prepared or preparing to accept him.”

The king's face changed colour, and became for the moment almost black with the suffocating emotions within. Never in his whole life had he been thus spoken to, brought face to face with so stern and brutal-sounding a truth. How dared the man do it?—he ! one of the king's own creatures !

He turned haughtily, as if to leave the place. But the soldier caught the hem of his robe, and maintained his hold, in spite of the violent gesture of the king to disengage himself, while he said, in tones of deep pathos,—

“ Sire, sire, why will you turn thus from your faithful and devoted servant ? You know not how true to you I will be in this business—how earnest in the discovery of all you seek to know—how joyful if I may fly back to you on the wings of hope, and cry, ‘ They are ready ! Come, sire, come ! ’ ”

“ My lord,” said the king, condescending again to pause and listen, even while his own voice became more grating than before, “ *I* have no estates now to bestow on you—no honours, no commands ! The

man of Holland can give you all. I understand. Farewell ! ”

“ No, sire ; I will not, cannot take such a farewell. I ask your majesty one question. If, sire, I pledge myself to you here, in the name of the Most High, that I will come back to you to report in person the result of my mission, whatever that result may be—if, I say, I swear to do this, if it be only humanly possible for me to do so by retaining my liberty—if, I say, also, I will enter into no arrangement of a political nature till I have again seen you—will you on that understanding, sire, confide in me ? ”

“ I will ! Yes, my lord, there is honesty in your looks, in the ring of your voice. I do accept your proposal, with all its consequences. Perhaps I was a little selfish ; if so, forgive me—I grow old and ailing. It will not be long before I and my rights must, in any case, cease to weary an impatient world. Give me, then, yet a little space—a little time to dream on, with a few dear ones about me. Let me die as I have lived, a king to those few.”

Leaning affectionately on the young soldier, the king walked once or twice through the length of the saloon before they separated, conversing in so low a voice, that the concealed listeners heard nothing distinctly.

After the General had gone away, the king and his adviser again took counsel together.

"So far as I mean to trust him," said the king, "I think he will prove safe. But the Duke of Berwick [the king's natural son] shall still go when events are ripe for him, as we had previously arranged; ay, and armed with power to stop this man instantly, if he sees occasion. In fact, the mission must be really confided to the duke; who alone can represent me with some of the nobles whose aid we need. See to that promptly, my lord marquis. The duke must at once be made aware that Lord Langton, however seemingly possessing independent power and authority, will really be subject to him; though it is most desirable that the power shall not be exercised, nor even its existence suspected by the General, while he acts with loyalty, discretion, and courage."



## CHAPTER IV.

### THE DROPPED FAN.

FROM the presence of the king the young soldier returned to Paris, and to his hotel, which was a house where aristocratic visitors were ordinarily quite unknown.

He was so absorbed in thought that he did not notice a sedan-chair waiting before the door as he entered; neither would he have perceived that a young lady was descending the stairs, had not her widely-extended brocade barred his way, and obliged him to wait at the stair-foot till she should have passed.

He waited, looking down on the stone floor with sad, pre-occupied eyes.

The lady, as she reached the last stair, dropped her fan. It fell at the soldier's feet.

He saw it, stooped, picked it up, and presented it to its fair owner with a cold but courtly salutation.

The lady smiled, blushed, and glanced into his

eyes with a charming air of bashfulness and involuntary admiration.

The soldier's melancholy eyes rested on her face an instant carelessly; then, as she stepped from the stair, he passed her by, and went up with a measured, thoughtful tread.

There was no one on the stairs or in the dreary-looking passage but these two persons; and, seeing this, the lady stood still and looked after the retreating form.

Her tiny hand, sparkling with rings, was laid on the balustrade, her head was thrown back, and she looked over her shoulder up the stairs with a peculiar smile.

Her beauty, and her rich and bright attire, seemed to make unusual light on the sombre staircase.

It was an exquisite face, blooming and fresh as a cherub's; and at this moment it wore something of a disappointed child's wistfulness and petulance, as well as its womanly smile of defiance.

As the soldier's footsteps died away, the sarcastic, smiling little mouth smiled more sarcastically still; the wistful eyes grew more wistful, even to tears, the eyebrows arched, the lips murmured—

“Silly thing! poor silly little Maria, always hankering after the good, and being snubbed and scorned! Why, he looked at me as if I had been a stone wall! Stick to the wicked, my dear; they use you best.

Stick to them, and *plot*—PLOT—PLOT! Adieu, my lord; we shall meet again in England."

And down swept the pretty, picturesque figure, in the profoundest of curtseys at the stair-foot.

"'Tis your own choice, General. If I did you an ill turn with a certain English lord, who, they say, should have been your papa-in-law, how was I to know that, till I got his letter, showing he loves you as the Evil One loves holy water? Besides, I didn't know you then—hadn't seen you. Now, I should have liked you very much if you had let me. It's my weakness to take to people that are young and handsome, as well as good. You might have found a friend and ally where now you will find—Maria Modena Preston, devoted servant of King William, in spite of my Jacobite name and blood. Maria Modena Preston, General, whom you looked at as if she had been a stone wall!"

Kissing her fingers towards the stairs, with a fresh curtsey, and a laugh on her blooming cheeks, she crossed the passage lightly, and entered her chair.

As to General Langton, he went to his bedroom, and there gave vent to the irritation and discontent he felt by taking off his sword, loosening the buttons of his vest, and throwing himself at full length on a couch.

"This, then," he thought, "is what the marquis meant by pressing me so affectionately to visit the

king! I dreaded something, yet hardly knew what. And now I am irrevocably committed! Is it I who am disloyal in heart to the king, or is it he himself who is disloyal to the true idea of sovereignty! But why do I think of these things now? He is what he is, and I must be content. Now then, to work!"

\* \* \* \* \*

Mistress Maria Preston is also at work. Two hours after her fan had been restored to her in what she thought such a cold-blooded fashion, she dispatched to London a couple of letters, written in the most elegant of womanly hand-writings, on the smoothest and most beautiful of vellum paper, and scented with a delicious perfume—this time not of violets. Who that looked at these fragrant letters as she sealed them with the green wax, and impressed her tiny gold seal on the centre of the oval deposit, could imagine they were letters calculated to shake the equanimity of a mighty people, and “perplex” its king and statesmen with “fear of change?” Those letters, addressed one to the Earl of Bridgeminster, the other to Mr. Speke at the Secretary’s Office, contained a full record of what she had seen and heard, guessed and suspected, behind the curtain in the saloon of the mockery king.

## CHAPTER V.

### KING WILLIAM IN COUNCIL.

IT was not the rulers of England alone, who, for the last half century had been "perplexed" with "fear of change," but their statesmen and courtiers also; who found their lives one continual struggle between their new and old loyalty—to Charles the First and then to Cromwell; to Cromwell's son and then to Charles the Second; to James the Second and then to William of Orange. Dear friends thus became estranged, happy families were broken up and utterly wrecked.

We should therefore despair of giving to our readers any true idea of the latent alarm and confusion that prevailed in the cabinet meeting that instantly followed the receipt by the Secret Department of the letter of Mistress Preston. We say latent, for the men who sat there were habitually accustomed to conceal all outward display. But as they gazed on each other with grave, imperturbable-looking faces, how many might there not be among those dignified statesmen who were saying to them-

selves, "*Who* is there I can trust if a serious contest comes?" or who asked of themselves, "*Am I* trusted or held in doubt?"

The king in person presided over the council, in the palace at Kensington; and with a calmness that almost looked like insensibility, but was in reality anything but that.

Distance, and the signal importance of his services to the English nation, have cast a kind of halo round the memory of the great deliverer, which blinds us to the defects and darker traits of his character, though they were plain enough to his subjects and contemporaries.

Personally, a more unpopular king perhaps never filled the British throne. Cold, morose, almost brutal in demeanour; foreign in his habits, in his speech, and in his tastes; utterly destitute of the faculty of imagination, and possessing no sort of literary culture; full of contempt for our greatest poets and literary men;—few self-respecting Englishmen ever found themselves in his presence without the wish to leave it as soon as possible.

His person was as unprepossessing as his demeanour. Small of frame, and with a great hook-nose, while the face and head were half hidden by the enormous wig, hanging down on each side, and covered with great curls; which made him look top-heavy above his thin stockinged-legs, Nature and

Art seemed alike to be jesting at his expense, even while Fortune acknowledged him as one of her choicest favourites. But there was worse behind than questions of aspect and manner ;—a something in him so mean and despicable, that one hardly knows how to reconcile it with much in his policy of an entirely different nature. What, for instance, can be more revolting to a generous mind than one special trait of his character, which seems admitted by common consent—he never forgave a personal service that had been rendered to him, but always bore a grudge against his benefactors ? Compare with this his indulgence to great crimes done in his behalf ; among which the Glencoe massacre stands ever prominent in its cowardly infamy.

On the other hand, there *was* something below this unlovely crust ; even that something which, at the first glance, seemed of all human things the least likely to be there—*heart*. He loved his queen with an intensity of devotion that finds few parallels in kingly history. He was by no means constant to her ; but, beyond all question, he loved and trusted her, and was repaid in her fullest love and trust.

And it is with all the sorrow of her recent loss still upon him ; with all the shame and scandal of a parliamentary inquiry into the Glencoe business, which can be no longer kept from the light of day ;

that he sees in the business of the present council the first rumblings of the storm of discontent which his wife's death has let loose against "the foreigner;" and upon which he knows well the Jacobites will confidently reckon.

"Where is the Earl of Bridgeminster?" was presently the cry. No one could answer the question. Had he been duly summoned? Of course he had. To make sure, the messenger who had been employed in going to the different members' houses was called in and questioned. He said the earl was indisposed. This he had learned from the servants, who, however, had no doubt the earl would be able to attend.

The king ordered the messenger to go with the utmost speed to the earl's house, and again summon him, with a message from himself.

While he was gone, remarks began to pass between two of the persons present, in a low tone that could not be overheard, about certain Jacobite tendencies of the earl; and these were supplemented by fresh remarks as to some old notions that had prevailed of a family alliance between him and the father of the very General Langton who was now about to raise anew the banner of civil war; and who had been chosen—so the whisperers thought—with devilish ingenuity, as embodying in his own person the two great elements of success: he was the very



*beau ideal* of an English Jacobite—aristocratic, able, energetic, and devoted; and he was, at the same time, a general in the French army, and authorised, most likely, to promise an army of Frenchmen to follow him.

These possibly malicious whispers were carefully guarded from the king, in whose favour the earl stood high; on account, so it was said, of some act of wholesale treachery to the Jacobite cause which had marked the earl's first outburst of loyalty to the Prince of Orange before his accession to the throne, and while James still trusted him.

"Hush!" exclaims one of the whisperers to his neighbour, "the messenger returns."

The messenger brought back a short and hurried note from the earl's daughter, Lady Hermia, addressed to one of the gentlemen present, which said that the earl, though ill, had been about to leave the house to attend His Majesty, when he had had what she feared were symptoms of paralysis, and was now in bed. She added that her father, in desiring his most dutiful respects to His Majesty, had no doubt he would be able to leave his bed in a few hours; when, if he were too late to join his colleagues, he would hasten to wait upon His Majesty as soon as possible afterwards.

The king was sensibly touched with this; but the malcontent whisperers were smiling in each other's


faces as if in recognition of some new piece of subtle diplomatising on the part of the earl.

Was the earl ill after all? Undoubtedly he was; just so ill—through the agitation of the news—as to be able to play to perfection the pretence of being very much worse.

Mistress Preston's secret letter to the earl had duly reached first, and given him the exact opportunity he needed—first, to evade the cabinet council, where he knew the particular work he wanted to do could not be done by him under so many suspicious eyes; next, to get the king alone with himself afterwards, when he felt sure of success.

And the unconscious king played into his hands, for when the council had agreed on a sort of rough memorandum of what was to be done about General Langton personally, His Majesty pocketed the paper to think over during the evening; meaning, as everybody knew, to consult with the earl about it.

We shall not describe that meeting which followed almost instantly after the breaking up of the other meeting—so wonderfully rapid had been the earl's recovery! We shall only transcribe the document that resulted from these double councils, and mark in italics the last paragraph, which was added by the earl; who professed, however, to have done so at the king's suggestion; and we are not sure that the king himself did not think this was the truth;



so skilfully had the earl managed His Majesty; who—as the earl very well knew—wanted exactly what he wanted—the noiseless but speedy destruction of this dangerous man.

#### MEMORANDUM.

A circular, and to some extent (at the discretion of the Secretary) private letter to be sent with the proclamation to Lords-Lieutenants and Justices of the Peace in the maritime counties, to the admirals or other port and harbour masters, to the local superintendents of the officers and men of the Preventive Service, to the military officers in command of forts along the British shores, and above all to the admirals of the fleets who are now guarding our own coasts, and threatening the coasts of France.

TO THE EFFECT—that the strictest watch be kept day and night, and in particular at all those parts of the coast where the landing from small boats may be otherwise made easy, through the absence of population, and the convenient character of the shore.

Let it be said that His Majesty's express sanction has been asked for this circular letter, and that while His Majesty will be prepared to acknowledge and reward those who may show wise forethought, unremitting care, and zealous loyal effort, he is equally determined to punish with signal severity those persons, of whatever rank, who may fail in their duty.

*Although it would be abstractedly desirable, in the interest of justice, to capture uninjured this desperate and dangerous rebel, it is of infinitely greater importance that no possible chance of escape should be afforded him by imprudent and untimely scruples. If he be once clearly identified, escape must be rendered impossible.*

Only a brief time has passed; and not in one place only, but in a thousand places of the British Isles, are people reading this placard:—

## PROCLAMATION.

## ONE THOUSAND POUNDS REWARD.

WHEREAS a certain person now under sentence of death, commonly known as General Viscount Robert Langton, but whose rank no longer exists, and whose estates have been confiscated on account of his and his father's heinous crimes, is believed to be about to return to England in the pay and interest of the detestable enemies of the country; it is hereby made known that the above reward will be paid to the person or persons who may discover and cause to be apprehended if alive the said General Robert Langton, or produce his body if dead. His Majesty relies on all his loyal subjects to aid in the same.

Given at our Court of Kensington Palace, the 23rd day of October, 1695. W. R.

## DESCRIPTION.

*Height*, about 5 feet 10 inches.

*Body* erect, of slender frame, but great strength and agility.

*Age*—Looks about thirty-five, but is younger.

*Hair*, reddish brown, when visible under the brown wig.

*Face*, melancholy.

*Complexion*, naturally fair, though deepened by exposure.

*Eyes*, soft, brown, dreamy, and at times extremely bright and penetrating.

*General carriage*, dignified.

*Speech*, slow and measured. Voice good, low, and melodious.

\*.\* A slight scar in the lobe of the left ear, which was cut through by a sabre, will furnish decisive means of identification, when taken in connection with all the rest. This, however, is not perceptible except on close examination.

Such was the welcome prepared for our unconscious hero through the kind offices of pretty Mistress Maria Modena Preston!

## CHAPTER VI.

DANIEL STERNE.

It has been said in the last chapter that General Langton was unconscious of his danger ; but was he also unprepared ?

Immediately after his interview with King James, and the encounter with the lady who dropped her fan at the entrance of his hotel, he had been for many days very busy : and during that time kept himself so entirely out of reach that the king and his adviser again had misgivings. They wanted to give him special instructions, and to consult with him ; but he was not to be found, though professedly retaining his apartments at the hotel ; and at last they concluded he had gone, intending to trust to the information he had received, which consisted of little more than the names of the friendly and more important English Jacobites (certain great nobles only excepted) that the king had given him.

But in the darkness of the night of a certain day he re-appeared at his hotel, and busied himself in

what looked very like secret and final arrangements.

As we glance in upon him, we see him taking off his sword, removing it from the scabbard, and looking very carefully along the gleaming blade from hilt to point, in order to remove any spots upon it; while he murmurs to himself, in deep tones full of emotion,—

“Here, then, we part! Bright, stainless, pure as the cause in which it was first drawn, mayest thou my sword—thou and I—be able to say the same thing when I hand thee to my heir in death!”

Having oiled it and wrapped it up with extreme care, he took the lace ruffles from his wrist, and changed his rich garments for others of a formal and plain character.

It may be useful here to glance for a moment, and once for all, at the male dress of the time, which differed only in different classes from the sovereign downwards by the quality of the materials, and its more or less ornamental character.

The tradesman was content with the dress in its plainest shape:—the square-cut coat and waistcoat of equal length coming down to the knee; breeches fastened below the knee, with long stockings of plain colours coming above it; shoes with upper leathers rising high over the instep, with crossing-strap and plain buckle; and the hat merely bent

into the most comfortable shape for the wearer's use.

But with richer and more fashionable persons the ordinary garb was made to assume an almost infinite variety and costliness by rainbow hues, gold and silver lacing, fine cambric ruffles, long neckcloths of point lace, feathers in the cocked hat, fringed gloves, broad sword-belt with jewelled sword-handles, and marvellous periwigs.

The General went to look at himself in the long strip of mirror that extended from floor to ceiling at a certain part of the room, and stood there so long as to show he was studying wistfully the effect.

Was he thinking about the chances of recognition in England by persons who had seen him recently on the Continent? Or was he thinking of Hermia, and her impressions of him should she first see him in that garb, and while he would be unknown?

Yet even then he could not doubt that she would at least recognise in him a gentleman; for while he looked at himself he thought that he really appeared to be disguised, and not what he wished to appear—a real pounds, shillings, and pence tradesman.

Laughing at that idea as a bit of absurd conceit in his personal superiority, he not the less began to collect the garments he had taken off; and to put them, with the ruffles and the sword,

into a long narrow package, to accompany him to England.

“Why not?” he said, in answer to some secret misgiving that he had no right to take them—that he ought not to be tempted to wear them under any circumstances in England. Why not? Did not everybody know that, besides England’s merchant princes of world-wide reputation, who held their own as gentlemen, even among the noblest families, there were tradesmen, aldermen, knights, and what not, who claimed to wear the sword in token of their gentility? If challenged when he should wear these as unfit for the humble tradesman, could he not say he meant to die Lord Mayor of London?

Having had his laugh, and his moment of lover-like recklessness while thinking of *Hermia*, he now returned to his common sense, and put the dangerous parcel by, to be left behind, while he packed in its place his French uniform.

He next drew forth from a trunk a casket of gold, richly chased, and out of this he poured on to the table the marvellous contents—diamonds, rubies, pearls, turquoises, sapphires, onyxes, carbuncles—all originally forming parts of tiaras, necklaces, bracelets, brooches, rings, but now divided for convenience of secret carriage.

How the jewels gleamed in the candle light! And how tenderly the owner looked on them, remembering



the mother who had worn the greater part of them ; and not forgetting the wife whose rightful heritage he considers them to be, if only he is able to retain them ! He could not help pausing a little while over them, as in anticipated regret for their probable sacrifice. These were all that remained to him of the great estates and large personal wealth of his ancestors.

Well, he would be thankful—first that he had got them, since he wanted to assume as one of his characters the position of a dealer in precious stones. That way he might hope to get access to the aristocratic English Jacobites without exciting attention by the effort.

He was glad, too, to remember that he was not obliged to sell any of them, even when offered ; except in those rare cases when he might find it dangerous, after an interview, to admit he was not that which he seemed.

Renegade friends are the worst of enemies. General Langton must be very cautious of them !

He wrapped up each gem separately in paper, put initial letters outside by which he might know the contents, then rolled the whole up in soft leather, very carefully arranged, and finally fastened the small but costly parcel in a long leathern belt, which he strapped round his waist, under his chamois-skin-shirt.

He next fetches a bottle from a cupboard, empties the contents into the wash-hand basin, and washes head, face, and neck quite low down vigorously. Emerging from that bath, he can scarcely help a cry of surprise at the sight of his own face—it is so much darker.

That was the only personal disguise, in addition to his dress, and a change of wig, black instead of brown, that he intended to attempt.

He seemed greatly pleased with himself on a second glance; and said, with a laugh,—

“What will Hermia say to such a blackamoor?”

Of course that was an exaggeration: he was simply a handsome, dark man.

Thus prepared, he took certain papers from his desk, and opened them; and the soldier, as he looks at them with a smile broadening on his face, cries out, in an animated and jesting voice, while apparently imitating in his gestures a master of the ceremonies marshalling some invisible personages,—

“*Exit* Robert Langton, General and Viscount!  
*Enter* Mr. Daniel Sterne!”

What does he mean? And these papers? What on earth can General Lord Langton be about to do with them; or how did he get them?

The first is an invoice, from a well-known Italian

firm, of a quantity of thrown or twisted silk, for the use of English manufacturers of silk goods. They are debited to one Daniel Sterne—who, however, pays promptly, for the account has been receipted at the time of purchase.

The next is from an eminent Brussels house, concerned in the fabrication of the rich and costly lace known as Brussels lace. Here, too, Daniel Sterne has evidently been a good customer.

The last of the invoices comes from Lyons, whither the ubiquitous Daniel Sterne has evidently been in order to buy the popular Lyons silks that were then so fashionable in England; and which were greatly preferred to those of home manufacture, even while the latter were rapidly improving under the influence of the French refugees, whom the revocation of the edict of Nantes had recently driven into exile, and who were settled in large numbers in this country.

And complacently now "Daniel Sterne" reviews his merchandise. Diamonds and other jewels, silk manufactured or silk for manufacture, Brussels and Mechlin lace—these are the commodities he now deals in; and he laughs as he recalls each successive interview he has had while on his way from Rome to Paris, thence to Brussels and Lyons, and back again to Paris; and how successfully he has played the part of a discharged sous-lieutenant to

whom some money had been left, and who wanted to invest it in goods for the famous English mart, Stourbridge Fair; and who was obliged to throw himself on their kindness and honour in dealing with him, since he knew nothing of the business!

But that ignorance did not last long. Daniel Sterne, *ex* sous-lieutenant in the French army, proved an apt scholar. While purchasing he put so many questions, and watched so closely the way in which the warehousemen handled and explained their several commodities, that by the time his preparations were complete he found himself ready to stand behind any counter in the kingdom, and behave with strict technical knowledge and habits in waiting upon the finest lady in the land. Not that Daniel Sterne intended, however, to do any lady such an honour if he could help it.

Such is the history of the invoices, which he restores to his pockets, while mentally calculating that his bales must all be now waiting for him at the place appointed.

Is all finished? May he start? No; some thought troubles him, as if with a suggestion that is at once tempting and dangerous.

But he decides at last, and sits down to write a letter, which is also in the name of Daniel Sterne.

And then his eye falls upon the costly gold casket that had contained the jewels, and which is of so

inconvenient a shape and size for concealment about the person, that he has been intending to leave it, with other effects, in the care of the landlord. But now, as he glances from the casket to his yet unclosed letter, his dark, rich eye glows with sudden pleasure.

He fetches from a trunk a curious-looking toy ship that had been constructed from a piece of soft wood with such extreme ingenuity, that all the chief features of an English war-ship were faithfully reproduced in it; and yet the ship was of such Lilliputian dimensions, that Lord Langton thought it would go into the casket. He tried, and it fitted admirably.

"Come, come," said the soldier, "I see the ship that is ever in our childish dreams to come home with all the wealth of the Indies for us does *sometimes* come; and come the richer for its voyagings. So, Master Richard Constable, there is your letter, which I have found a safe and speedy channel for, and here is your argosy, which I must myself guide into harbour."

He then read over again the letter he had just written, before sealing it. Thus it ran:—

If Richard Constable in manhood resembles the Richard Constable known to the writer of this as a boy, he will perhaps be willing to allow a debt of gratitude to be repaid, by coming to the ensuing Stourbridge Fair—if he cannot even venture a little farther—to Harwich; where Daniel Sterne proposes to land about the 27th

of October, with some bales of goods, consisting of Italian thrown silk, Brussels and Mechlin lace, and Lyons manufactured silks—all which he has been collecting, at the first hand, from the best houses, and means to sell at the very lowest remunerative prices.

General Langton smiled as he came to the last few words, and then the smile died out as he faced for one moment, in thought, the dangers he was about to confront. He knew them only too well, though he had not chosen to think of them. Now, at this last critical moment, when the irrevocable step was to be taken, can we wonder if his heart failed him, and if there came a kind of rush of alarming suggestions? Might not the English Government already have got some inkling of his purpose? No, no; it was impossible—he had too carefully guarded himself.

He sat down and leaned for an instant his elbows on the table to support his head in his hands, and was fast giving way to thoughts that became more and more gloomy, when he sprang suddenly to his feet, his eyes blazing with fierce and joyous light, and his lips murmuring the single word—

“Hermia!”

And that was the last hesitation of General Langton about his terrible expedition.

And the night was the night in which, all over the British Isles, people were discussing the new PROCLAMATION.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE FISHERMEN OF BAR-SUR-BEC.

DETESTABLE as war is when its fierce and fiery breath blows like the Sirocco over the fair face of the world and reduces all to an arid desert, there is still often to be found a green oasis—some spot or some incident which shows that humanity is not quite transformed ; that mutual slaughter is not yet become the one absolute law of life, even where the combatants are face to face.

An incident of this nature promised to get our hero over his first difficulty—that of crossing the Channel in the face of the English war-ships that were everywhere roaming about, threatening the French ports and harbours, and keeping close watch over all craft that approached the British shores, whether small or large, row-boats or great ships, and whether belonging to the enemy or to neutral or to friendly nations.

After much consideration the General had decided to go direct from France ; and from a spot where, if he could only find the means to cross, the run would

be a short one, and the danger concentrated into a few hours.

Of course he had to pay for this advantage by great additional risk, in thus audaciously embarking in front of the English ships from an enemy's shore. But he had thought his whole scheme well out, and we now find him at the place whither he had caused his merchandise to be sent on before.

The place chosen had struck him as eligible for two reasons—it was a most insignificant village, the very name of which was hardly to be found on any but the largest maps; and it was also a village having plenty of boats, for the inhabitants were some twenty or thirty fishermen and their families, and the small tradesmen who depended on them.

To his great disappointment, he found on his arrival that the tiny fleet of fishing-smacks were all hauled up together on the shingle, in fear of an English ship of war that he saw in the offing.

Meantime the poor people were in the deepest distress, in consequence of not being able to pursue their trade. All this they explained to him with a rude, vigorous eloquence and simplicity that greatly touched him.

What was to be done? they wanted to know, thinking him a countryman, and seeing how interested he was.

What was to be done? Ah! that was a question



of infinitely greater importance to him, too, than he would have liked to have explained to them.

Mingling among them in the garb of a man of the middle class, looking like a travelling commercial agent, he ventured to talk to them freely; and thus found that they had never given the English captain a chance of showing any courtesy to them, but had flown at the first sight of that gigantic bird of prey, like a flock of domestic birds—flown home for shelter, and never again ventured forth.

He remonstrated with them laughingly, but found it was no laughing matter to them; nor did their statements leave him without a secret sense of shame and indignation at the doings of his own countrymen. Small quiet towns, inhabited chiefly by fishermen like themselves and small shopkeepers, had been bombarded, they told him, by English men-of-war. To that he could only reply by denouncing the brutes who commanded them, but it was only just to say these must be exceptional; brave soldiers and brave sailors would never war with such humble, inoffensive people as themselves; that this particular ship's position as regarded them and their village was doubtless a matter of pure accident; that it was most likely one of a line of scattered sentinels, intended to give the British admiral the earliest possible notice of any and every incident likely to be of interest to him in connection with the war.

And then he urged them to show confidence, which, with generous enemies, always secures respect, by hauling down their vessels, putting up their sails, and starting off with the then favourable tide.

His eloquence was useless until he began to hint that if they did as he advised, he had himself some business in hand which might profit them.

The nods and winks that presently began to pass round showed him that his hint had been taken; and that they understood him to be a smuggler who wanted to evade the duties, which were very heavy in England on all French goods, and especially so on the commodities he had to deal in—laces and silks.

“Now, my friends,” said he, addressing a group of stalwart, hairy-looking men, with seamed and bronzed faces, standing in front of a row of cottages, “if you will be guided by me, you shall not only go on with your fishing, but receive a handsome gift besides, to make up for your past losses.”

They began to listen now.

“Bring me paper, pen, and ink; also a table and a chair.”

They were brought, after a prolonged hunt through the resources of the whole community.

“Which of you can write?”

All shook their heads.

“Then I must write for you, I suppose. Let me

see. It's awkward work to tell what is passing in all your minds, but I must make a bold plunge, and see how I get on. Listen then, and as I write, you shall hear me repeat that which is written."

The soldier sat down, took up the pen, looked round half-humorously upon their faces, which were so full of various expressions—ludicrous, inquisitive, sad, dubious, stern, or ferociously patriotic (as keeping sharp watch upon this possibly recreant brother)—that he could not help smiling, as he said,—

"I suppose you'll all expect to be equally accurately represented as to your views?"

The men looked on each other, became conscious of what he meant, and then a good-humoured laugh broke out, and became universal.

And then the soldier began this unique letter, having not only to think the sort of thoughts that he supposed to be in their minds, but to fashion the thoughts into words that might, at least, distantly resemble what he supposed would be their own choice if they had written for themselves :—

The humble appeal of the poor fishermen of Bar-sur-bec, which is to show that they have no means of livelihood but by fishing in the waters outside the bay ; and that they are in great distress, through their fear of being taken as prisoners of war, and their boats, which are their only possessions, being lost to them and to their families if they go out.

But now they begin to think that the honourable captain of a ship of so great a nation as the English would never condescend to

hurt them ; and they humbly ask his honourable self to pardon their unworthy fears, and to allow them to say they will, with his kind permission, come out again and go on with their fishing, and make their wives and little ones glad.

Such was the letter. And it was an amusing sight to watch the faces, and to listen to the remarks of the fishermen, as they heard this letter from themselves in the course of composition. One moment their faces cleared in hope, as if the clouds were passing away ; then the next they looked grave, as in fear their patriotism might be going to be compromised.

But when he had finished, he could hardly have been looked on with more awe, respect, and admiration if he had brought them a revelation from heaven.

“Are you satisfied ?” he asked.

“Ay, ay, monsieur ; and God bless you !

“But are you all satisfied ?”

“All, all, all !” was the cry.

“Now, then, tell me your names,” said the soldier ; and as he wrote each name down, the man to whom it belonged came with a shy look or a grim laugh to see how it looked, and to attach a cross by way of mark.

“There, friends ; that’s done ! I cannot say we are sure of success, for that rests with a higher power, but I think it will succeed. Quick ! Out with one of your boats. If anything happens to it,

I will make up the loss. What brave fellow is there among you who will venture his liberty in the hope of giving you all relief?"

"I'll go!" "And I!" "And I!" were the cries, till the contest was who should be allowed to go.

A young, dare-devil sort of fellow obtained the post, through the soldier's own slightly-marked preference for him.

He was soon off, while all the people on shore watched him and his bark, which danced up and down merrily in the eager breeze, and warm, bright morning sun.

A large white handkerchief had been fastened by two corners to the mast, by the soldier's orders, to give the idea of a white flag of amity, in indication of the nature of the business of this marine ambassador.

This flag was to be hauled down just for a moment, if the answer were satisfactory, and then again set flying aloft like a streamer in token of triumph.

How those stern, weather-beaten, anxious faces waited and watched, in deep silence! How their wives, who had by this time got to understand the business in progress, gazed in tearful suspense!

How the soldier himself, who had originated the movement, and, while doing so, had forgot at times

his own need in seeing theirs—how he now stood absorbed in intense thought, wondering whether this, his first venture, was to be a failure or a success!

Yes, the ship is reached! The fisherman furls his sail. He is seen to hand up the letter. There is a long and terrible pause.

The soldier reminds himself that it was not at all improbable that there might not be a single person on board able to read the letter, which was in French, and which he had not ventured to translate, lest the circumstance might invite questionings or speculations about the scribe.

Presently, they see the fisherman being hauled up the ship's side.

The little crowd on the beach thrills and quivers like one human body. The anxious faces look no longer over the waters of the beloved little bay, which to them are the waters of life; they turn one after another to where the soldier stands—they turn upon him with gleaming eyes, full of fierce meaning.

There is a whisper amongst them that their brave young comrade is taken prisoner; a woman in the crowd shrieks; and the soldier hears all around him low, muttered cries of, "Treachery! treachery! Watch, comrades, watch! It shall be life for life, man for man!"

Past the threatening faces, and across the sunny water to the ship, the young soldier gazed steadily in anxious and haughty silence. Presently he raised his arm, smiled, and pointed to where a minute ago all eyes were looking—the ship.

“Ha! there he is! there he is!” cried a voice; and there was a simultaneous shout, and a joyful crash of feet down the beach stones. For no sooner was the young fisherman back in his boat than he hauled down the handkerchief, and immediately drew it up again.

Surely he must have heard the shouts of his comrades; for, not content with again suspending the mimic flag in triumph, as agreed, he began to wave his hat.

Then what renewed cheers from the beach! What a rush to the boats!

In the space of an hour, the little boats were all out in the accustomed place, hanging about the dreaded monster, and plying their usual vocation, with no more fear than if the idea of war had never yet been known among men.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A CONSPIRATOR AND HIS WEAPONS.

CONTENT with his first success, the soldier ventured nothing further for the whole of that day and the succeeding one. But on the night of the second day he called to him, at the little inn where he was staying, the man who had carried the letter to the English ship of war, and startled him by a point blank offer.

"My friend, I want the aid of a cool and brave fellow, and I know now you are the man. What say you? Twenty louis d'ors to take me and my bales across to a spot which I will indicate, very near Harwich."

"But, monsieur, how is it to be done?"

"Easily. I see you all go out very early in the morning, just at this time."

"Yes, monsieur, just about daybreak."

"Can't you persuade half-a-dozen of your comrades to go still earlier to-morrow morning, so that some of the half-dozen, and your barque for one, might be outside the English ship a full hour before it is light?"



"Ay, ay, they won't mind, monsieur, if I give 'em a reason; but they like reasons, and good ones too, monsieur."

"Prudent men generally do. If I were to make the twenty louis d'ors twenty-five, would the reasons be forthcoming that would bring five other vessels besides your own, at the right time?"

The young fellow laughed, and thought they might; so went off to make arrangements with his own mate, and for a couple more hands, which the soldier thought it advisable to have, in case they might have to trust a good deal to the oars.

At that instant the soldier saw with astonishment a man in a rustic garb, and with a common-looking ash stick in his hand, walk into the inn, and advance towards him. He gazed as at an apparition. The man bowed as no rustic ever bowed, laughed, made a slight but expressive gesture of apology for putting aside all dangerous or imprudent recognitions of rank or name or social dues; and then simply held out his hand, which the soldier shook, but with no very cordial response, as he said,—

"How in the world did you find me here?"

"Ha! that's an interesting story, and some day I'll tell you the rather *piquant* details of my adventure. But we've no time now."

So spake the premier of King James—for it was he.

Withdrawing to an upper chamber, the soldier's bedroom, in which they were quite out of danger of listeners, the instant the door was closed, the courtier said,—

“My appearance here surprises you?”

“Undoubtedly.”

“And yet it is very easy to explain—I mean, as regards the motive of my visit, or pursuit, or whatever we may call it. When kings will manage their own affairs, they generally make a mess of them. Judge you! He gave you no credentials, I think?”

“No; and I thought he did not care to give me any.”

“Quite a mistake. Do you know this?”

The courtier exhibited a massive signet ring, of truly regal quality and costliness.

“Yes; it is the king's.”

“It was. It is yours now. His Majesty sends it to you, in token of his royal affection and respect; and gives you permission to use it as you please for the promotion of your embassy.”

The soldier took the ring, held it for a moment in his fingers, as if he saw there concentrated all the devotion and all the reward of a lifetime, then kissed it, and was about to put it on his finger.

“Stay,” said the courtier, “it is quite impossible for you to wear it thus.”

“Of course, I know that,” said the soldier, a little hastily, as if in anger.

"Pardon my forethought. I have had this little skeleton frame of open-work in gold made for it. Permit me to put it on. There! Now you will not yourself be able, I think, to recognise the original, though, as you see, it is only a small part of it—the jewelled portions—that are hidden."

"Admirably done! But I cannot now remove the frame."

"Try."

"No; I am unable, without doing it violence."

"I am glad to hear you say so. Look, and you will see how easily the thing is done. Press with the point of a bit of stick, or of your pencil, as I do now, this little depressed stud, and there it is—open. One of the first artists of Paris managed that bit of ingenuity for me, and in a very few hours."

"I am sincerely grateful."

"Now for another and weightier matter. The king did not, I believe, tell you that His Majesty of France has promised us, and is now preparing, an army of invasion; but which will act only on condition that some decisive and unquestionable guarantees are first given to him that those of the English nobility and gentry who are secretly favourable to our cause shall, even at the risk of their lives and fortunes, have all things ready to summon an English army to join the French the moment they land."

"That," said the General, after a few seconds' reflection, "looks kinder than I fear it will prove. What is it but an alliance between a captive and a free man to do a great work together against a usurper, only it is the helpless captive who is to begin, who can neither write, speak, nor move, except in the extremest peril?"

"Well, my lord," said the courtier, stung with what he fancied was a sarcasm, levelled however unconsciously at his own pet project, "there is no doubt that not one but many lions are in the path, to use an expressive but homely phrase; and if you don't like the look of them, even at this distance, why not turn and go back?"

"My lord, pardon me if I now propose that we separate, so that our meeting may attract as little attention as possible. Bear my honest and heartfelt devotion to my sovereign, and tell *him*, if there be a lion in the path, I will beard him, and know at least it is no ignobler animal that usurps his skin!"

"Very good. Will you accept from me a weapon that may do to belabour the ass, even if it be of no avail against the lion?" And the courtier held out that common-looking walking-stick which he was carrying when the soldier first saw him enter.

The soldier looked at it, and then at the face of the courtier in wonder and inquiry.

"Not a handsome one, you think?" said the latter.

"Certainly not," said the soldier, with a smile, who saw in it only a stout, serviceable ash stick that had not apparently been long cut from the hedge.

"Nor valuable, eh?"

"Ha, you must instruct me upon that," said the soldier, beginning to look on the stick with respectful curiosity.

"Look it well over. Take it. Handle it. Test it."

He did take it, and he began to try to unscrew it, first at the head, then in the middle, then towards the bottom, and not succeeding, he inspected it minutely in the expectation to discover some faint line or circular ring that would show the place of opening, but was obliged to give up the search.

Then the courtier took a watch-key that was attached to his watch, turned up the dirty end of the stick, cleared out with the aid of a breast-pin a minute hole that then looked only a mere accidental depression in the wood, inserted the key, gave a few turns, which caused a small portion of the circumference of the end of the stick first to revolve and presently to protrude, and then he pulled, and lo! a slender, hollow, and extremely light rod of copper came forth, measuring probably a foot in length.

"There," said the courtier, "is an ash stick that doesn't grow on every hedge. Take it, and the key—which is, you will note, like the stick, beyond suspicion, being merely a watch-key, though strengthened specially for this particular service."

"Thanks! thanks!" said the soldier, as he began himself to try to manage the secret of the stick, and succeeded perfectly. Then the courtier added,—

"Should you have occasion to carry about with you any dangerous documents, roll them tightly and smoothly, one at a time, with extreme care, round the copper rod; and when you have done so, fasten them with silk thread at each end, and in the middle. Be sure no edges or corners of the papers can get loose. When you wish to restore the rod to its place, push it in, using a gentle and continuous pressure, till there remains only about half an inch of the wood that supports the rod, outside. Then insert your key, turn it to the right, and you will find the protruding end slowly disappear, and become perfectly level with the surrounding rim of the stick. Draw out your key, dip your stick in the nearest puddle or dirt-heap, and it will then defy the nicest examination, so perfect is (as you see) the fit of the moveable part into the immoveable."

"And may I ask to whose ingenuity we are indebted for this?"

"An interesting question, not only for the sake

of the ingenious artisan who made it, but for the sake of the original author of the design—your father!”

“My father!” said the startled soldier, looking for the moment as if the fact gave him greater pain than pleasure.

“Yes—he long ago threw out the idea to me, but we could not then get it made, and so it was forgotten till I revived it, in your service now.”

What a record of intrigue and conspiracy did this little incident seem to recall to the son’s mind—who, unlike his father, hated everything that was sly, secret, equivocal! Now, however, there was no choice but to use all means that offered, that were not in themselves dishonest or base.

“Well, now, as to its first use,” continued the courtier. “I have brought with me a document that I did not mention before, because I must candidly say it is one so dangerous for you to have about you, that I have doubted many times whether I ought even to show it to you. Besides, as you have the signet ring, I think it is not absolutely necessary, though His Majesty thinks otherwise.”

“Indeed! Then I must certainly see it, and judge for myself.”

“Very well; but remember I have warned you first; and I tell you, farther, that the signet ring

was intended expressly to enable us to evade imposing on you so dread a responsibility."

"Let me see it."

"You have it in the stick."

"What do you say?"

"It is in the stick."

"More surprises!" exclaimed the soldier, as he again drew forth the rod, wondering that he had not noticed the paper round it, if paper there were.

There was nothing visible but the bright polished copper rod, in which the soldier could see his own ludicrously-distorted face.

He looked at the upper end of the rod; it was open—that is to say, hollow—right to the bottom. He looked into it, and dropped a small pebble in, and shook it and heard the clear sound of the metal everywhere, showing there could be no paper within. Then the courtier, having sufficiently amused himself with the soldier's difficulty (and behind this amusement, let us observe, lurked very serious and important desires to influence the young man), took the implement in hand, and unscrewed the rod from the inch or so of wood in which it was embedded at one end; then turned up the lower end of the rod, unscrewed a small portion of the metal, and there within was a little space, less than half an inch in diameter; and in that space lay coiled the document, with a thin disc of metal beyond, which cut off the



communication with the lengthened hollow part of the rod; and cut it off at that precise point which would cause the latter, if measured by the insertion of a thinner rod, to appear the same as the length without, when measured only to its insertion into the bit of wood. Naturally, therefore, the measurer would suppose there was only the thickness of the metal below the point he touched when testing the inside length. And there lay the coiled-up document.

“An extra precaution,” said the courtier, “which might save one from discovery, even if the rod were discovered, as by an accidental breakage of the stick. Nay, the rod itself might be unscrewed from the wood that supports it; and even then, you see, it requires a sharp eye to note any indications of the screw-piece.”

“Ah, well,” said the soldier, with a sigh, as he thought of himself, his father, the courtier, and the king, all engaged in this unkingly device—“let me see the paper.”

It was drawn forth very carefully, and very carefully unrolled, being of thin texture, and the soldier read as follows:—

To our loving English subjects generally, and more especially to the noblemen and gentlemen whose names are inscribed below, we commend our faithful and well-beloved servant, General Viscount Langton, who is armed from us with express authority to communicate freely and confidentially in our name and behalf.

JAMES R.

Such was the document, which was duly dated from St. Germain's, and witnessed by the courtier himself, the Marquis of Burfield.

"Of course," said the soldier, "this document would be absolutely fatal to me, under any and every circumstance, if found?"

"It would."

"Then, is it necessary?"

"Who shall say? The signet ring may not be sufficient to induce men to commit themselves to you, who will, as I conclude, be personally unknown to them all."

"No doubt of that."

"Well," rejoined the courtier, "I will advise no man in such a risky business, just as I would not myself be advised."

"Would you, if now in my position, accept it?"

"Do not ask me. How can I be sure, if I answer, that my answer would be a strictly just one; seeing that I am not in your position, and am, therefore, not able to identify myself absolutely with it?"

"Grant that, and then tell me what you think you would do."

"I doubt if I should have undertaken your task at all, but since—— No, I'd rather be silent."

"But, having undertaken, you would not spoil the chances of success by more or less of attention to your personal safety? Right! I think so too."

I doubt seriously—I own it to you now, after what you have just said—whether I ought to have undertaken the mission; but I will go through with it, and will cheerfully accept this increased risk in the hope of thus showing to His Majesty that if I fail in benefiting the cause it will be from the nature of the case itself.”

“True—true. I will take care the king sees it in that light. Indeed, I will not disguise from you, that if your mission ends, as I see you fear it must, in failure, I shall renounce all further hope or effort, and wait quietly, like my Sovereign, for death to end the coil.”

Then the paper was returned to its hiding-place.

“If you had not flown so suddenly from Paris after your interview with the king, we should have arranged all these things there,” said the courtier.

But the soldier made no comment, fancying the conversation would otherwise turn on his motives for such strict secrecy, and being determined to keep his plans in his own breast.

He took a letter from his pocket, and handed it in silence to the marquis to read:—

VERSAILLES, *Sept.* 21, 1695.

MY DEAR GENERAL,—By command of His Most Sacred and Christian Majesty, I write to express to you the regret with which His Majesty received the tender of your resignation of your command in his army; and also to express his royal sympathy with the presumed cause—the private and family motive and aim—that you were so good as to explain to me in confidence.

Should circumstances at any future time make it desirable to you to return to France—perhaps to bring the lady with you as your wife—His Majesty directs me to assure to you beforehand a substantial mark of his affection, that may in some degree compensate you for your family sacrifices in a cause still dear to His Majesty—that may remind France of your brilliant, though unhappily brief services, and commemorate the restoration of your military rank.

With best wishes for the domestic happiness you are now about to seek, I have the honour to be your lordship's very humble and obliged servant,

BEAUREGARDE,  
*Private Secretary.*

“A noble letter!” said the marquis.

“Do you know what I am going to do with it?”

“Not destroy it, surely?”

“Certainly not. I shall wrap it round the rod.”

“Excellent! So that, if that be discovered, it will seem to explain all, without suggesting farther discovery; and at the same time put the best possible construction on your motives for coming to England. Excellent, my Lord Langton; I congratulate you on your initiation as a conspirator!”

## CHAPTER IX.

### ON THE MOTHER'S BREAST.

AN hour after midnight the soldier and the courtier, who had got into a long and friendly interchange of thought and knowledge with regard to the work in hand, got up from the table at which they had been sitting, to go to the window to look out.

It was dark, but not so dark but shadowy forms could be seen moving about among the boats, in preparation ; and so in a little time the young fisherman came to say they were all ready.

"Farewell," said the soldier, holding out his hand to the courtier.

"No, I shall go with you across, and see you safe to the opposite shore."

"Surely you will not endanger——" Then the soldier stopped, noticing the fisherman at the door.

"Pooh ! I have thought of that. 'Tis nothing. I have been used to hair-breadth escapes. *Our friend that you know of*, will be very glad to be informed by me that you did get across with your goods, beyond all manner of doubt ; whereas otherwise he might remain ignorant for months whether you and

your goods had not been captured by the revenue men in crossing."

"Very well; 'tis kind of you and brave. Come!"

At the precise time fixed—one hour before the earliest gleam of dawn—the watch on the British war-ship saw the spectre-like sails of the fishing-boats approaching, three dropping anchor on the landward side, as shown by the sudden taking in of their sails, while the other three pass the ends of the ship, as if to do the same thing on the other, or seaward side.

"Holla, mounseer! can't you sleep quiet in your beds?" hailed a hearty English voice from the ship.

"Ha, ha!" responded the Frenchman addressed, waving his hand the while, not knowing how otherwise to give a polite answer to what he supposed must be a joke.

An officer heard this in his berth below, and came up to see what it was about. And then he and the officer in charge of the watch got talking about sundry topics, till finally they got on the subject of the fishermen and their letter. Then the officer from below said,—

"Do you know, I have been a little puzzled about that letter; and though I didn't say anything to the captain, in pity to the poor starving wretches, still

I have been waiting and wondering whether it might not grow into a larger affair—one decidedly interesting.”

“Eh? What?” said the wondering officer of the watch, who had been half in a reverie when disturbed by the fishing vessels, and again while listening to his companion’s talk.

“How many of these fellows did you say passed seaward a little while ago?”

“Three; one at the stern, two at the bow.”

“How many do you see now?”

“By the lord, only two!”

“Of course not. There’s the whole scheme before you. The other’s off to England. Pretty stroke, isn’t it? I’d stake my life our captain has been pretty considerably gulled, and that yon missing boat carries something worthy of all this ingenuity.”

“Quick, then; warn the captain. The wind’s shifting round. The fellows won’t make much way. We shall all have it hot and strong for this!”

In two minutes the drums were beating to quarters. Then they stopped as suddenly as they began, as the captain saw the importance of a silent pursuit through the favouring gloom.

While the anchor was being weighed, a couple of boats were hastily lowered, armed, manned, and

dispatched—one to go inclining to the right, the other to go inclining to the left, while the ship itself would take the middle way between.

The weather had been slightly threatening for the last few hours, and soon became decidedly bad.

When daylight broke, the ship got the first glimpse of the fugitive smack, which was a couple of miles or so ahead, going in a straight line direct to the English shore.

Boom! went the ship's cannon; not in the hope of the shot yet reaching the boat, but as a timely warning to lie to.

The warning is unheeded. On flies the devoted barque, under the pressure of as much sail as it had been possible to put up, and which the soldier had caused to be seen to before they started, in the fear they might need wings of unusual power. The wind is again favourable, and the light barque seems almost for a time to have the best of it.

Boom!

Larger and larger looms the war-ship to the eyes of those in the boat, as she, too, flings forth sail after sail, till her speed increases so fast, that escape grows obviously hopeless.

Boom! a shot—the first that has reached—now is seen to fall in advance of the boat, making a grand waterspout. Again, boom! and this time the shot goes right through the gunwale of the boat.



“ Warm work ! ” cried the courtier, with a grim laugh, and showing his cloak with a cleanly cut hole. Then adding, to the soldier, in a low voice :—

“ The game’s up ! Shall we drown now, or live to show them how gallant gentlemen can die in the executioner’s hands ? ”

The soldier sat grimly silent.

“ Up to the scaffold, or down to the sea’s bottom ? ” said the courtier, repeating in effect his former words, as he saw the English war-ship rapidly approaching, and wondered at the silence of the soldier ; who was concentrating his thoughts upon the momentous question, and asking himself what was his duty with regard to his wife, now that his sovereign’s commission was so evidently ended—even before it had well begun.

But at this critical moment occurred one of those incidents that naturally suggest to the human mind the idea of a providential interference, even while it is explained by natural and sufficient causes.

The war-ship was seen to turn on its course, fire again on the boat, which remained uninjured, and then, wonderful to say, go back the way it had come ?

What could it mean ?

The boat’s crew saw nothing to explain the incident—saw nothing but the retreating war-ship. What could the English captain mean ?

The boat's crew might see nothing through the gloom of the yet undeveloped daybreak, but the English captain had seen much. He had seen a sight which changed his views in a moment.

It was a large vessel, indistinctly visible, passing the very spot where the war-ship had been so long anchored, and the sight of it greatly embarrassed the English captain.

He had been specially ordered to look out night and day for a vessel that, it was believed, was fitting out in France to take arms to Ireland in the cause of James.

What if he had now been the victim of a most skilful *ruse*? What if the boat he was pursuing was nothing but a worthless decoy, taking him away at the critical moment?

Boom! went the cannon for the last time at the boat, to express the baffled captain's rage; and then the ship was turned round, as we have said, to go in pursuit of this new attraction; which, after an hour or so, was caught, and turned out to be merely a Dutch merchant ship, engaged on its own lawful business.

The captain's only consolation was that which he expressed in his angry speech when he went down to breakfast,—

“Well, if these rascal fishermen, who have so tricked us, are not now ashore, I can promise 'em

they'll have a nice time of it; the storm's upon them in earnest, and I'll defy them to venture in. And if they do stay out to sea, they won't be long in going to Davy Jones's locker."

The captain's words proved only too true. The soldier's barque was unable to get in, and was left through the whole of that terrible day and a still more terrible night that succeeded, weltering aimlessly, helplessly, hopelessly upon the waves; rising and falling, minute after minute, hour after hour, in connection with waves so gigantic that it was impossible to avoid the conclusion the barque must founder, sooner or later, in one or other of those tremendous gulfs between.

As night approached the inmates of the boat were almost blinded with the incessant flashes of lightning, which gave the soldier the fantastic idea of some fabulous monster of the sky, lunging in deadly antagonism, as with a glittering rapier, at the world beneath; whose bellowing cries of indignant rage in reply were heard in the thunder.

The crew and the two gentlemen became at last perfectly exhausted with fatigue, and the long exposure to wet and cold. Had any man less habituated to forethought in action than the soldier had the management of the expedition, they would doubtless have been also destitute of food; for the voyage

was expected to last only a few hours ; why, therefore, lay in supplies for two or three days ? The soldier had even been asked that question a little suspiciously before starting, by the crew, who fancied he must intend a longer voyage than he announced. But he only said,—

“ My friends, I always try to guard against accident. If there’s an unnecessary abundance of food, take the overplus back to your wives.”

They had, therefore, plenty of bread and meat, of wine, and of strong liquors in case of need ; which last the soldier kept under absolute control, doling out now and then a small glassful to revive the fainting energies of the men ; but never himself touching any liquor but water, of which also he had secured a small keg.

At last, as daybreak again approached, and when they had been just four-and-twenty hours afloat, they had the relief to see the sky clearing, the great waves diminishing in bulk, and the barque again becoming under command. The rain fell incessantly, but the thunder and lightning had ceased.

Anxiously they now looked in every direction for the first glimpse of land ; and in about half an hour a faint low line began to be dimly perceived—the coast-line of Britain.

The sails were got up, one after another. The wind was again favourable, and a sense of inexpress-

sible comfort and gladness began to diffuse itself in all their hearts, when again, as with a voice of doom, was heard the terrible boom of a piece of cannon from an unseen ship.

Looking back, they could discover nothing; so with fresh spirit, they sped merrily on. But the soldier said to his friend, in a low voice—

“Perhaps they see us with the aid of their glasses; and though we do not yet see them on account of the obscurity of the night, I fear they are very near to us!”

“What did you say?” exclaimed the courtier, in a tone of surprise, and as if he was meditating about some difficulty in his mind, caused by the soldier’s remark. “What did you say about the obscurity?”

The soldier, on his part, was equally startled by the reception of his words. After a pause, he drew out his watch, and said—

“Can you see the time?”

“Certainly.”

“Strange! I can scarcely distinguish anything through the gloom. I wish the day would come.”

“Day! Gloom! My dear friend, I can’t for the life of me guess what you are talking about. Heaven help us! it’s only a great deal too light for us.”

“Do you really see the shore?”

"Only too plainly; for we can now be readily seen from the shore."

"And—the—ship?"

"Is nowhere visible; the shot could not have been aimed at us."

"And you say you can see the hour by my watch?"

"Nearly seven o'clock; wants only a few seconds."

"Merciful heaven! I cannot even distinguish the white dial plate, except as a slight and wavering glimmer?"

It was but too true! The tendency to blindness to which the general had become occasionally subject, through his long period of command in the trenches during one of the great sieges of the war, had again been developed by the exhaustion of these twenty-four dreadful hours.

"This is truly sad," said the courtier; "but you will soon be relieved, I hope."

"I trust, in heaven's mercy, it may be so. But the honest truth is, I have no hope except through absolute rest for some—perhaps many days."

"Stop!" shouted the courtier to the men. "We will change our route. Keep along the coast till we may hope to be out of reach of this unseen warship, then recross the Channel to your homes."

"No, no, go on!" said the soldier, in a commanding tone.

"My dear friend, it is sheer madness."

"Probably. And have you not heard that madmen are often supposed to be under the special providence of God?"

"It cannot be."

"It shall be! I will go on at all hazards. Put me only on the beach—me and my goods, the merchandise whereby I hope to realise the future you and I so earnestly covet—do that, only, and I will gratefully thank you, and abide by the result."

"I cannot accept such a responsibility."

"You must. I am responsible to myself alone, just now, under God."

"No, no! I cannot acquit myself to my own conscience, or to our honoured master, to let you do this. Be guided. I entreat you to let me now arrange for the best. Think, only think! How can you even get to a place of shelter in this unhappy plight?"

The soldier was silent for a moment, as if fully realising the force of all this, and that pause emboldened the courtier again to bid the crew to turn the vessel.

The soldier drew forth a pistol, and said, in tremulous accents, that still it was impossible to doubt expressed an unconquerable will—

"The man that obeys is dead! Blind as I am, there is yet life enough in my soul to perceive what

you do, and to punish those who disobey. On, on!"

"Your blood be upon your own head! I wash my hands of the whole affair," said the exasperated courtier.

The boat was rapidly approaching the shore, and the soldier knew his time was nearly come.

So he took the hand that was clasping the gunwale of the boat close to him, pressed it warmly, and said—

"Pardon my rough words and rougher action. I must obey my destiny. A few hours will set right this little accident. Accept my thanks for your truly gallant and friendly behaviour in seeing me thus far, and let me hope you will not have endangered yourself for my sake."

The grasp was returned; and the courtier said—

"No; I think these fellows don't care much about the voyage back—partly because when we get free from the immediate danger, we shall be supposed to be English till we get near the French coast; and then, they know that coast so well, they'll manage, so they assure me, to run in safely through any number of enemies."

"That is good," said the soldier.

"Are you ready?" asked the courtier.

"Quite."

"We are getting among the breakers. There are



low rocks all about. A queer place; but it's the best the men can discover."

A sharp crisis was experienced in passing from the sea outside to the quiet shore within, across the foam-crowned breakers. But it was done so skilfully that in a few minutes they were within three or four feet of the land, and striking against a rock that barred the passage of the boat.

They had unconsciously got locked and jammed among low, black, bulky rocks, amid which it was almost a miracle they had not been dashed with violence, and broken like an egg-shell.

But they had the good fortune to drop into a natural channel, where the violence of the waves was greatly modified by the shelter; and as the rocks were all visible, and the hands of all on board were vigorous in keeping the boat from them on both sides as much as possible, the boat got, as we have said, safely to a kind of harbour at last, but with that high rock in front barring the way, and jagged rocks on either side, over which it seemed impossible for foot to pass.

The courtier rapidly explained to the soldier the state of things.

"Can I get upon the rock in front?"

"Perhaps."

"And can I leap from it to the shore?"

"I think so, if really——"

"I am ready. Guide me. Where shall I stand?"

The courtier took one hand, and a fisherman the other, and guided him till he stood with one foot on a seat, and the other on the edge of the boat.

"Don't fear for me!" he said in a cheery voice. "Only give me clear directions, and all will be well."

But while thus pausing in so critical an attitude, the boat violently rocking, he shouted loudly to the men behind him—

"Hold! Put my goods on shore first. I will not stir till that is done. Mind my staff, I shall need it to guide me! Thrust it through the cords of one of the bales! Fasten it safely. I must have it to walk with when I get ashore."

"Ay, ay;" said the other fishermen in the boat, and they soon fulfilled his directions. One of the men in returning clambered up to the rock, to be ready to give a hand to the blind man as he ascended.

"It's an ugly place hereabouts," he cried, "even for men with eyes. The Lord help them as is without!"

"Now!" said the soldier.

The two who supported him now lifted him gently and skilfully up against the face of the rock, where there was no possible foot-hold except the top; and though the weight was considerable for such a posi-

tion, they soon got him high enough to feel the fisherman's outstretched hand, and to be able to touch with his knee the edge of the rock; and then it was but a moment's effort, and his tall, erect form stood out in the grey dawn, in a conspicuous, almost commanding attitude; for his arms were raised, while he poised himself with difficulty on the slippery rock ready for that terrible leap in the dark which must be made, and which was altogether so significant of his fortunes.

At this critical moment, a cannon was again heard booming from the distant and unseen ship.

The soldier paused, as in doubt about it.

"Are you ready?" cried the courtier. "We must go."

Then again the boom. What it meant no one could guess.

And then for the third time—boom!—at the same exact interval of time that had passed between the two first explosions.

"It must be a signal!" shouted the courtier—"perhaps, to people on land to be ready for us. Will you now go back?"

"Never!"

"Haste, then, or I shall be caught, too. There are people running along the tops of the hills."

"One moment!" urged the soldier. "Do I stand right for the leap?"

"Turn your face a little more to the left."

"Right now?" shouted the soldier, with his back to the boat.

"Quite right."

"Then, farewell!"

"Farewell!" responded the courtier, and for a moment he held his breath to see the soldier go.

He leaps! He is gone out of their sight.

"Off!" shouted the courtier, and the crew prepared to obey, even while pausing to listen for any cry from the leaper, or to get sight of him moving in safety along the beach.

They saw him not; they heard nothing.

The soldier had, indeed, leaped with a stout heart; but the rock was slimy with rotting vegetation, his feet lost in a measure their spring, and so he fell short, and into a pool, among the lower rocks beneath the greater one from which he had leaped.

"Hadn't we better see if we can help him?" asked the captain of the little crew, when, after waiting a moment or two, he still saw no form of man move to the sides of the rocks so as to be visible on the beach.

"No, idiot! away with you!" said the marquis.

The boat was then pushed off, and thus they left the soldier exile.

There he lies on the shore, half in, half out of the

sea; bruised, bleeding, and blind; but able, even now, when he can do nothing else, to stretch out his loving arms to grasp the dear and coveted soil, and cry—

“At last, Hermia. At last!”

He crawls a few yards up the beach, and stumbles against his bales, then life becomes a blank. The soldier lies senseless on the breast of the dear mother, England.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE "MOTHER'S" WELCOME.

THE first thing of which the General was conscious when his senses returned to him, was the sun penetrating, as it seemed, in spite of the season, to his very heart, and giving it strength to beat. The next thought was England—he was in England!

He raised his head with a faint cry of joy, but he could see nothing. He lifted his arms helplessly, strained his sightless eyes, and fell again, and turned his face to the stones. And then, too, he felt bitterly cold.

In England, in the sunshine, and yet in utter darkness, utter helplessness. It was terrible, too terrible!

He heard the sea tearing at the beach stones with its strong, hooked hands behind him, and he heard the distant wood-birds singing, and many other sounds from far—inland sounds, that he had so often longed to hear again; he heard them now, giving him a mocking welcome, and he knew it was a sunny English morning, while he was in such darkness—such cruel darkness!

He lay quiet, with his face on the cold, wet stones, trying to still his bitter grief, and think.

He knew no gleam of sight would return while the sun was blazing on his face. He covered his face with his arms to shut out the light, and closed and opened his sightless eyes patiently.

Presently he began to see flecks of light dancing in the darkness formed by his arms ; and his heart beat fast with hope.

After several minutes he thought he saw something grey and shining close to his face. Yes, it was the stones ; he could see their different sizes now. He closed his eyes again, and rested ; thanking God that he could at least see inch by inch before him ; even while the wintry cold grew less and less endurable.

He longed greatly to lift his head and look landwards, almost feeling as if the sight of a green English field or tree would give his eyes new strength. He raised himself on his arm, and looked up along the beach, his eyes travelling slowly and painfully over every yard.

He saw a little tuft of black seaweed, and still further on a pinky shell. Surely he might now lift his eyes. The green land could not be far off ; the singing of the birds sounded so near. He raised his eyes, and they remained fixed on the first object they met, with a gaze half of stupor, half of fascination. What was that object ?

It was no green tree or field, nor was it a familiar English face come to welcome him. It was one of his bales of merchandise, unstrapped, unstitched, its bright contents shining gaily in the sun, and being turned over and examined by a hideous, half-naked man, on his knees; a man of great height and strength, with villanous-looking eyes,—savage, blood-shot orbs, in which there was a red point that gleamed like a live cinder—glaring forth from under their hairy pent-house, east, north, west, south, and then east again as if for some kind of satisfaction.

They are satisfied, for they see nothing. Nothing, at least, he needs to fear. He sees only the recumbent figure, lying there dead or senseless, it doesn't matter which,—and those most tempting bales, one of them just opened, the others wrapped in their new tarpaulins, and bound by straps, and new, white, massive cords, which are provokingly suggestive of the wealth within.

A groan—which the General was unable to repress as he tried vainly to rise, drew the attention of the ruffian, who glared vindictively from under a pair of shaggy and monstrous eyebrows of a sickly reddish hue, to see whether it was or was not necessary to strike.

A knife was in his hand, but that hand shrunk for the moment, as if imbued with independent life, like a guilty and treacherous thing out of sight, as the



glance of the prostrate man fell upon it. Unable to rise, the General lay watching him like one under a charm. Then as the short, bright knife in the man's hand cut string after string, under his fascinated gaze, he remembered what kind of man this must be into whose hands he and his goods had fallen—a Wrecker!

He looked from the busy, villanous knife to the intent, villanous eyes. The villanous eyes looked towards him, and met his gaze.

The Wrecker started to his feet; the eyes and the knife seemed to grow too bright and villanous to look at.

Seeing the owner of the bales helpless and apparently unarmed, and thinking perhaps to put him off his guard, and then to strangle him, and so leave no trace behind of a murderous hand, the Wrecker threw down his knife, and advanced, at first slowly, and, step by step, as if to parley; suddenly he gave a spring. There was a deafening crash down the shingle, and in an instant the Wrecker's grasp was on the victim's throat.

Weak as he was from want of food, from almost superhuman exertions, and long apprehension of death, the prospect of a hand-to-hand fight, even with a herculean giant like the wrecker, was less horrifying to the soldier than the idea of perishing helplessly.

A little dagger, with elaborate handle, of foreign workmanship, hung within his breast. With this he cut the hand of the wrecker, so that he was obliged to let go.

Pressing his advantage at the dagger's point, the General managed to rise first on one knee, then on both, and at last to stand erect.

The Wrecker glanced round after his knife, but did not care to recover it. Watching his opportunity, he threw himself upon the unfortunate soldier, as if fearing nothing for his own safety, bent only to destroy his opponent.

The General struck with the dagger, he hardly knew how, then was flung to the ground with a violence and ferocity that deprived him of all the little strength that had outlived the demands upon it, during the last two or three terrible hours. He still, however, grasped his dagger with stiffening fingers, and struck feebly at the monster, who began to drag him along in his arm to where the knife lay.

He had nearly reached it, and his victim had sent one last wild glance of despair on the fair green hill, the blue sea and sky, and then had turned his eyes again on what he felt would be the last sight they would look upon—that gleaming knife which the wrecker's bleeding hand was groping for, while gazing on his victim—when suddenly a fresh, youthful voice shouted—

"Hollo! Fair play there, masters, in the king's name!"

The Wrecker paused, with his knee on the chest of his victim, and turned his face, more horrible in its fear than in its murderous rage, to where the voice came from.

The General, looking neither to the right nor to the left, cried feebly—

"Help! for God's sake, help! I am being murdered!"

"All right!" shouted the voice, cheerily, and in another instant a tall, strong-looking young fellow came bounding down the side of the hill.

The Wrecker got up, left his late foe, seized his knife, and stood facing the new-comer, who stared at him and his prostrate companion in the greatest amazement. As his eye met the eye of the General, the latter raised himself on his elbow, pointed at his opponent, and gasped—

"Beware! Wrecker—murderer—help!" Then he fell back, and lay watching with dizzy brain and swimming eyes while the Wrecker and the stranger confronted each other.

The Wrecker, grasping his knife, glared at the stranger, and the stranger still stared at him with profound astonishment.

"What do you want?" hissed the Wrecker, getting nearer to him.

The young man backed a step or two, looking uneasily at the knife.

"What do you want?" repeated the Wrecker, with an affected calmness that made him only the more dangerous.

"What do I want!" said the youth. "Nay, my friend, *I* want nothing, and if I don't mistake, it seems to me you have been giving this gentleman here more than he wants. By your good leave, I'll help him down to the village."

A likely project for the Wrecker! who knew that then the treasures on the shingle would no longer be his, and that he himself would probably be caught and strung up in chains as a pirate.

The General saw the stranger endeavour to pass the Wrecker, saw the Wrecker stay him, saw the knife snatched by a bold and subtle stroke from his hand, and flung into the sea.

Again the youth and the big savage stood looking at each other and pausing. By-and-by the stranger shouted to the General past the Wrecker—

"Am I to understand, sir, that this—this—shall I say seafaring gentleman?—has been using you ill?"

"He has robbed me—ripped open my bales as you see—and tried to murder me," was the faint reply.

The stranger had not to endure very long the

embarrassment which this announcement, made before the "seafaring gentleman" himself, caused him. As soon as the words passed Daniel Sterne's lips, the Wrecker made a rush at the young man, with his fingers hooked ready to seize his throat.

Sudden as he was, the stranger was too quick for him. He leaped aside in safety, and instantly turned to confront the hideous savage. And though he looked flurried and nervous, being so young, he still retained his self-possession, and stood warily on his guard, while yet evidently uncertain what to do.

"The rock! get up there, and stand at bay!" cried the soldier, with true military instinct as to the value of a position, and the best mode of equalising the strength of the combatants.

The stranger looked round, saw the rock, and bounded as lightly upwards as a goat or a mountain deer might have done; but just as his foot touched the summit, it slipped, and he fell.

The Wrecker was after him; and, knowing that, the young man instantly rolled over to the other side of the surface of the rock, before attempting to rise to his knees.

The General watched with sickening anxiety. He saw the two men crouching on hands and knees, glaring at each other, on that same rock where he had stood, some time ago, how long he knew not, preparing for his blind leap. He saw the two men

meet—saw them close—saw them sway from side to side in a death grapple—then sea, sky, cliffs, and men seemed for an instant to turn all to mist.

When the mist cleared, *one* man stood on the rock instead of two.

Which of them was it?

While he asked himself that question, hardly daring to try to look more steadily at the descending and approaching form, a voice said—

"By the mass! he was a tough customer. Well, he's gone, I've rolled him into the sea, and I'm in for it nicely!"

The General lifted up his head at the sound of the cheery voice, and looked round with a sigh of intense relief. The stranger lived—he was safe—and had saved him! Mental and bodily alertness had beaten brute strength.

Slowly and with difficulty he rose to a sitting posture and held out his hand murmuring, "I owe my life to you!"

"Well," said the stranger, "the seafaring gentleman gave me no choice but to do the handsome thing at once. I beg your pardon, but you look at me as if you knew me."

"Were you not looking for some one in this neighbourhood?"

"Aha! Daniel Sterne at last!" exclaimed the youth, greatly pleased; and who now made known

his name and condition ; “ George Osborne, apprentice to Sir Richard Constable, knight and alderman of the City of London, at your service, Sir. My master, not being able to come himself in answer to your letter, sends me.”

“ You are most welcome,” said the soldier, pressing the youth’s hand fervently. Then he added, in a tone (so George at least fancied) of disappointment, “ Do not think me churlish and ungrateful if I tell you, at once, we must postpone business till I do see the good knight himself.”

“ Delighted to hear it, sir, I’m sure,” cried George, with an air and tone that betokened no particular sympathy with business for its own sake.’

“ If you will kindly help me in my present feeble state for a few hours——”

“ With all my heart, sir, and for as long as you please.”

The General was so completely exhausted in body and mind, that he accepted George’s advice to lie still where he was an hour or two. He was soon warmly wrapped up in things taken from his bales. He had a flask of wine in his pocket, and George had biscuits. The General ate, drank, and was refreshed ; then he slept.

Meantime George had gone away at the General’s urgent wish to find the coastguard men, and tell them what had happened, both as regards the

landing of the goods, and the still more awkward incident of the struggle with the Wrecker, and his disappearance; about which the poor lad got more and more nervous as he thought how differently he and they might judge his story.

He found a couple of officials at last, and brought them back to see the bales. The two men were at work examining them when the General awoke, greatly the better for his short nap.

Then the bales were repacked, and taken away in a cart to the Custom House at Harwich, where George undertook to follow them, on account of the owner's illness, and pay the dues.

George had told the coastguard men the story of the Wrecker, and told it so truthfully, that Daniel Sterne had been able to confirm his every word. They were, however, unpleasantly startled by the attitude of the revenue officer, who insisted on it the two were smugglers in league, who had quarrelled with one or more of their comrades, whom they were denouncing in a spirit of vengeance, while carrying off the booty.

But he began to listen to the account given by the General—that he had taken ship at Amsterdam in a vessel bound for Sunderland and London, which had promised to put him down at Harwich for Stourbridge Fair, but had got past Harwich before they were able to do so on account of the storm;



and then, when he clamoured, had agreed to put him ashore from a boat where they then were, a couple of miles or so from the port, but refused to go back. This story, followed by the exhibition of the invoices, by the mention of Sir Richard Constable's name, and by a bribe of a couple of guineas, slipped by George into the official palm, finally set things straight. And then George's mind was made easy as to the Wrecker: he had been seen crawling along the beach, evidently hurt and in pain, but alive; and was not therefore likely to embarrass the youth or the intended victim by the summons of a coroner to an inquest.

Supporting the General on his arm, begging him to lean his whole weight upon him, and cheering the way by the vivacity and brightness of his spirit and temper, George conducted the supposed Mr. Daniel Sterne to an inn about a mile off, where he had already stayed while seeking for the Mercer's correspondent. There the General was obliged to go to bed, after giving George money and directions as to what he might do for him. When, however, the young man had managed the Custom House business, and seen the bales all safely deposited at an office at Harwich, whence they would be immediately forwarded by waggon to London, he was greatly surprised on his return to the inn in the evening, to find that Mr. Sterne, who was soundly

- sleeping, had given orders that he must not be waked; and had left out a note for him begging him instantly to return to London, and promising an explanation of his abruptness at some future time. He would write from Harwich, whither he proposed to go as soon as he was sufficiently recovered, telling Sir Richard the time and place of the expected arrival of the coach in London; and would be deeply gratified if George would then meet him and guide him through the intricacies of London streets.

Puzzled—annoyed—and piqued, for he had been anticipating a special treat in his intercourse with one who so much interested him, George merely said to the maid-servant, who gave him the note,—

“Very well!” gave her a memorandum of his proceedings at Harwich, and the change left after paying the dues; then turned on his heels and hurried off to Harwich, to go with the bales in the same waggon back to his beloved city:—the finest in the universe in George’s opinion.

## CHAPTER XI.

### A FRIEND IN THE ENEMY'S CAMP.

WITH a buoyant, almost joyous feeling, the General sat down, next morning, to eat his first formal meal for two days. The blindness had gone as suddenly as it had come; his strength was fast returning to him; George Osborne had been got rid of, without, as the General hoped, any danger of being compromised as a Jacobite plotter (one of the deadliest crimes in the opinion of the government); and here he was, on the beloved soil, where he had a wife to recover, and a glorious commission to fulfil: one that might yet enroll him among the list of his countrymen's most illustrious men!

He ate heartily, though still observing that temperance which was ever a law to him in all things. After breakfast, he inquired about a conveyance to Harwich. Nothing of the kind was to be obtained. Could he have horses, one for himself, one for the man to go with him and bring both back? Yes. He ordered man and horses to be got ready immediately.

- While he waited their coming, he saw a mounted revenue officer with several of his men on foot, approaching the inn. Presently the officer alighted just in front of the General, and gave the bridle to one of his men.

He was a tall, thin, small-faced, sallow man, of a remarkable aspect. It was not simply the look of intense shrewdness or cunning that seemed to have moulded every line, and to shine out from every glance of his rapid-darting, bright, but furtive eye; it was more than this—there was something behind, or below, or above, inexplicable, mysterious, sinister! If that man were in the possession of the king's proclamation [which was yet, of course, unknown to the subject of it], woe to General Langton!

He was polite—almost too polite for the General's taste—when, after mutually bowing to each other, he began to put questions, and make comments on what had previously passed with the revenue officers, but as if quite accepting their story.

“Your name if you please.”

“Daniel Sterne.”

“Occupation?”

“Dealer in foreign silks and other commodities.”

“Hem! Ha! *Foreign* commodities!”

All this while the General was conscious that the man's eye, and ear, and thoughts were in a state of preternatural excitement; and he could not but ask

himself—Had he left any loophole open for discovery? Could the Government be on its guard already?

When these preliminaries were over (the General preserving all the while an invincible good humour), the officer took a printed paper from his pocket, and began to read aloud, commenting as he went on, but without the slightest preliminary explanation.

“‘*Height, about five feet ten inches.*’ Scarcely so tall, I think, but near enough. ‘*Body erect, of slender frame, but great strength and agility.*’”

The General laughed and said—

“I’m afraid that won’t do for me. You see I am bowed as with age. And as to strength I’m obliged to this friendly stone and to this man’s arm for the means to get upon my horse.”

“Probably ill. Makes all the difference, Mr. Sterne,” And the officer read on: “‘*Age—looks about thirty-five, but is younger.*’ Yes, very deceptive face as to age, Mr. Sterne! But you agree with me, I dare say, that the difference says little. Will you kindly take off your wig? Thank you. ‘*Hair—reddish brown.*’ Turning grey here and there, I see, which is odd if so young.”

“But if I am forty instead of thirty, what say you?” demanded Daniel Sterne, with the same gay, careless demeanour.

“‘*Face, melancholy.*’”

"Ha, ha, ha!" burst out Daniel Sterne. "That's too good, with one's whole life a jest."

"It is melancholy; very!" said the officer, looking as steadily at Daniel Sterne's face, as if it were the face of a waxen image or a piece of marble sculpture, and not of a living man.

"*'Complexion, naturally fair, though deepened by exposure.'* Hum! hum! Must have been very much exposed indeed of late, *if not dyed.*"

Again Daniel Sterne laughed, and proposed to test the matter by a wash.

The officer coolly went on—

"*'Eyes, soft, brown, dreamy, and at times extremely bright and penetrating.'*"

"Look, sir," said Daniel Sterne; "I have been but now almost blind through a few hours' exposure at sea, so *weak* are *my* eyes. And as to bright—nay, I think you said, '*extremely bright and penetrating*'—I pray you to look."

And then, with a happy instinct, Daniel Sterne managed, while looking into the officer's face, to recall in thought a vivid sense of his recently helpless and hopeless condition, and the officer appeared to own he saw nothing to justify the words he had repeated.

"Impudent scoundrels, Mr. Sterne, such as I take you to be—— Ha! Exactly! I thought so. Dangerously '*bright and penetrating*' when angry.

“‘*General carriage, dignified.*’ No doubt of it. Pardon my rough jest just now, Mr. Sterne—it was only a trick of trade, such as you, I dare say, quite understand when bargaining. ‘*Speech, slow and measured. Voice, good, low, and melodious.*’ A little affected, I suppose, by the illness; but I can quite imagine, Mr. Sterne, the pleasure of listening to you, *especially when we think of the theme.*”

Daniel Sterne’s equanimity was over. Danger—imminent, terrible—was again before him. But how? Was his coming known? Had he been proclaimed? Or had secret instructions been sent to all the ports, revenue officers, &c., to lie in wait for him?

No matter; he was prepared. Haughty and indifferent he stood, leaving things to their course.

Was the personal description over? Who had given it? Happily, he saw still a gleam of hope. There was not one single trait yet adduced that was decisive, so if he could but——

“Mr. Sterne,” said the officer, “very likely all this may be a mistake. But you look ill. Allow me to offer you my arm, to lead you back into the inn.”

“Thank you, I have my stick, my unfailing friend.”

And again Daniel Sterne smiled, as if he saw yet something to be done if he could but get hold of the

officer alone. There was that in the man's face which made him fancy a bribe, skilfully offered, might avail.

They did get together and alone in the room, where the table was still covered with the remains of the late meal.

"Keep close watch outside. Surround the house. I'll make every man of you answerable if he escapes before I know what and who he is," cried the officer, loudly.

So saying, as he stood at the threshold of the door, to the men outside, he went in, closed the door, locked it, and drew down the blind, saying—

"How bright the sun is in this room!"

It was bright, though piercingly cold. The sun, like a ball of the intensest crimson fire—a sort of gigantic Polypheme with one angry eye—glared into the room, till rudely shut out by the officer's hand.

Turning from the blind, he took off his hat, bent low, and said, in a whisper that hissed and thrilled through the apartment—

"General Lord Langton, I salute you! Lieutenant John Montague Fox, of the Preventive Service, salutes you!"

For an indefinable minute, and yet felt space of time, Lord Langton hesitated, then burst into a hearty laugh, saying—

"Why, my friend, this is better and better. I,



Daniel Sterne, become Lord Langton! No, my friend. I do own to a little ambition, but not quite to that. That's a cut, as they say, above me. I should like to be made alderman, to be knighted, have one's wife called Lady Sterne—I know she'd like it—and shine, in time, as Lord Mayor. But there I stop; can't go any farther—no really! And, pray, who the deuce is Lord Langton?"

The officer looked at him a little doubtfully, and Daniel Sterne saw a sort of qualm pass over his face, as if he really thought he was about to lose a grand prize after all. But he said nothing, only took the proclamation from his pocket, and read a certain paragraph he had carefully avoided before, while in the presence of his men.

*" 'A slight scar in the lobe of the left ear, which was cut through by a sabre, will furnish decisive means of identification, when taken in connection with all the rest. This, however, is not perceptible except on close examination.'*

"Permit me," said Lieutenant Fox, as he finished the paragraph, and approached the prisoner.

"Before you look, let me ask you, Is it worth while? You are a wise man, a prudent man; life has its chances for all of us. You think this is my chance, and that it is not a good chance. My friend, it is your chance, too; and you may make it very good for us both. Will you?"

"No, I throw off the mask! I want no bribes. Oh, my dear lord, did you suspect nothing all this time?"

"Suspect?"

"Ay, that King James has friends in strange places, even in King William's own camp!"

"Is it possible?"

"It is true. But speak low—in whispers. You know now why I would not read the last paragraph before the men. But pray be on your guard, both for your own sake and mine. Your life is not worth an hour's purchase, if you endanger it by any *premature* attempt to escape; nor mine, if I were discovered to have shown any kind of friendly feeling towards you in my behaviour."

"What shall I do? I will implicitly trust you. How fortunate this is?"

"You will trust me? Oh, my lord!"

And the two men grasped hands, while the officer was so moved as to bend his head away to hide the emotion he felt. Then he said—

"We haven't a moment to lose. You must escape from here, before we get you behind prison walls. I can keep you here—say for rest—two or three hours, not more. Let me see!"

The officer ran to look out of the back window, which opened on a little court behind, with a very high brick wall; one quite impossible for the captive

to ascend without artificial aid. He jumped out to examine the door. It was a strong one, with a lock and key, and opened upon a bit of wild heath, which was, for the space of a few yards, not visible from any part of the house. He came back, and said, with some hesitation—

“It’s a difficult job to do, and yet have to make it seem not done. But it must be this way:—Yes, I’ll make them formally lock the door to the heath, and bring me the key. I have one at home so nearly resembling it, that I am sure I can in a few minutes, with a file, make it answer. I’ve played many a trick of that kind when I used to act as messenger between the men over the water and the men on this side of the water. Well, now, my dear lord, in just two hours from this time, my horse shall be feeding outside that door, on the heath, as waiting for me. She never moves far away, when you put her to grass. Besides, I’ll hitch the bridle over a stiff bush to prevent accidents. At that time you’ll hear some noise or commotion in front. That shall be a false alarm, which I will get up as well as I can, to draw the men together in front, where we want them. Then fly!”

“I shall see you again, my dear, generous preserver?”

“No, I—I think not. It would be unsafe.”

“Take, then, this in remembrance;” and the

earl put a small diamond into his hand, which he had kept ready, hidden in his vest, for an occasion of this kind. "One of my family's jewels; you can have it reset."


The officer hesitated, while glancing down at the sparkling gem, but said at last—

"No, no, my dear lord! If I had been merely a mercenary of King William's, I won't say what I might have done; but, *being what I am*, it is impossible! Do not tempt me!"

"As you please," said the earl, shaking him cordially by the hand, and detaining him for a wistful glance into his face, that might enable him ever after to recognise so valuable a friend. But the lieutenant, as if engrossed with the dangers to be encountered, did not respond to the movement, perhaps did not notice it, but hurried away.

"Is he true?" was the soldier's first thought when alone. "Can I absolutely trust him? Surely no man could play so execrable a part to the victim he is going to lead to the scaffold! And for what? No, no, no!"

An instant afterwards the lieutenant was heard locking the door outside; giving orders in a loud, stern voice about the key of the back door; planting his men in the passage of the house, and sending others to the front; and reiterating continually, with an affectation of severity that helped to satisfy the



captive as to his good faith, his former orders about shooting the prisoner down if he attempted to escape, and then he could hear no more.

The officer did not go home to fetch that counterfeited key. He went apart with a sub-officer to make quite other arrangements.

"Stubbs," said he, after a prolonged bit of musing, "how many men have you here?"

"Nine, sir."

"Have they all their carbines with them?"

"All here, or close by."

"Any good shots among them?"

"Two on 'em 'll hit anything bigger than a hen at a hundred yards: the rogues have learned, I suspect, by practising on neighbouring gentlemen's game o' nights."

"Put one of those two men at a window upstairs commanding the view of the back court, and of the door. The other put on the heath outside—say about twenty or thirty yards off—and tell him so to conceal himself among the bushes, that he can make sure, absolutely sure, of killing the prisoner should he attempt to pass out through that door, after having been missed from the window. Let him wait till the man from the window has fired and missed. No doubt he's a Jacobite, and a very dangerous one. By the Lord! his illness made me forget to look at his ear! But I won't go in again just now,

to make him suspect what I'm about ; for I've quieted him a bit, while I get time to think what it's best to do with him. I shan't move from here till I see my way. He's very ill, and will be the better for two or three hours rest. Besides, if I take him to Harwich gaol—the only place at all near where there's safe custody—I shall lose sight of him, and be possibly juggled out of some of the advantages of the affair, which is likely to be good for us all.

“Well, as to his chances of escape. There can be no other way than through that back window of the room that he is in, into the back court, and then over the wall, which is very high ; or through the door, which demands a key. Have we any traitors among us ?”

“Oh, no—no, sir. No fear of that. Besides, there is not one of the men as has spoken to him in private ; so it's clean impossible.”

“Then it may be the landlord, or that young cockney fellow you told me of, who testified for him, that he relies on. Anyhow, it doesn't matter. If he does want to escape, and actually makes the attempt—then I know my man.

“Stubbs, my boy, I've had a hint that I dare not repeat to you ; but, if he is the man, he's bound straight for the gallows unless some loyal servant of King William's saves His Majesty from a deal of

unpleasant talk about cruelty, and so on. Understand, Stubbs?"

Stubbs looked a little flustered, and began to redden in the face, but presently he said—

"I'm only to obey my superior's orders, am I?"

"Nothing in the world else."

"All right, sir."

"Go and get yourself a glass of brandy, and give one to each of the two men you've planted. They're sober fellows, are they?"

"Very."

"Then one glass will only inflame their courage and determination, as well as rouse them to make sure use of their skill. Stay! Stubbs!"

"Yes, sir?"

"At the precise moment when I shall fancy he might be thinking things favourable, couldn't you raise a false alarm—anything will do—to make a row in the front of the house? The devil's in it if that doesn't tempt him, if he really wants to escape!"

"I'll do it, sir."

"And, stop, Stubbs! Mind, don't you and your squad come hurrying round to the back, because it is impossible to say when he might move, and a glimpse of any of you at the back would stop him. It's a little risky, perhaps, to trust all to two men, but—Now then, off!"

The lieutenant took a note-book from his pocket, and read to himself, with extreme gravity and deliberation, the following words, which he had himself written there, and which the reader will recollect formed a part of the memorandum drawn up by the king's council:—

Although it would be desirable in the interests of justice, to capture him uninjured, it is still more to be desired that no conceivable chance of escape should be afforded him, by any imprudent scruples. If he is once identified, he is to be so dealt with that escape shall be impossible.

“Hum! ha! It is desirable that he be uninjured, but more desirable that he shan't escape, injured or uninjured! *Imprudent scruples*. Mark that! Escape to be impossible! How, unless by——

“What if he be not Lord Langton after all? What infernal fiend put that thought in my mind just now, when everything looks so wonderfully fair?

“He may be some one else, also in danger of law and authority, but not worth twopence to the Government, or to me. If so, how neatly he accepted his rank in order to puzzle me! As to the ear, he may have wished me still to believe he was Lord Langton, and therefore evaded showing it to me.

“I can't murder the man in ignorance, and then, perhaps, be myself compromised when it is found I have made a mistake.



"I'd give a hundred pounds rather than see him again, and yet I must! I must take him the key myself, if it be only to look at his ear."

Then, drinking some of the brandy he had been recommending, but by no means confining himself to the same little glassful he had assigned to his men—for he drank half a tumblerful to stimulate his courage before going to see his captive—and, putting on a most visibly artificial face as he paused an instant at the door for the purpose, he went in.

"My dear lord," he whispered, "before I give you the key that is to be your 'Open Sesame,' permit me to make myself quite sure I am not incurring all this risk except for the man whose family have for so many years been a household thought with me; permit me to look at your ear."

"Certainly," said the captive, smiling.

"Yes, it is the mark—the sabre-cut. I had not the least doubt, but wanted to satisfy my conscience—my conscience, my dear lord. Heaven bless and prosper you! Farewell! When you hear the row in front——"

"I am ready now."

"Farewell!"

The officer goes to an upper back room, where he finds a man kneeling at the window, resting his carbine on the window-sill.

"Higgins, Stubbs tells me you are a superb marksman."

"Thank'ee, sir; pretty well, considering the sort o' weapon."

"If he should try to escape from that door, you are certain to hit him?"

"He hadn't better try it on, sir."

"Promotion, Higgins, may come out of this."

"All right, sir. Do I wait till I see him on the wall, or trying to manage the lock?"

"Wait only so long as to be sure he is trying to get away. Don't try to wing him; that may cause you to miss. Aim at the centre of his back. I fancy it may be soon. Don't stir, whatever noise you may hear in the front. Don't let your eye leave that door till he lies dead—that is, if he does break out—or till you are relieved."

"Trust me, sir."

The officer then went to the outside of the house, saw Stubbs and his men ready for the signal, and in passing whispered—

"Stubbs, when you see me lead my horse away—it is now grazing close to the back door—when you see me lead it away, give the alarm. Make row enough. Run everywhere except to the back, till you hear shots; then you might draw round to the

back too, with all hands, as additional help in case of need."

"Tonson, if he should try to escape, and Higgins miss him, and he pass safely through the door, can you trust your nerves to keep steady, and bring him down."

"Let me alone for that, sir."

This conversation passed on the heath. Who the speakers were we need not state.

The officer now went along with downcast eyes towards his horse, which, seeing him, began to neigh.

"Fortune itself favours me! He knows now the horse is here. One minute more, and Lord Langton is a dead man, and John Montague Fox will have made his name famous where he wants it to be famous, earned promotion, and a thousand pounds."

Not trusting to his previous directions to Stubbs, he walked round with his horse.

Stubbs turned, and saw him standing there in the moonlight with one arm raised, and knew Lord Langton's hour had come, even if his officer had not uttered a low, but distinct and fierce, "Now!"

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE EXPLOSION.

"Now!" said the treacherous lieutenant, as he gave the signal agreed on with his subordinate, Stubbs.

And breathlessly he stood at a little distance, to watch the moment of explosion.

And if he thought of his victim at all, it was only to desire, with greater intensity of hate, to make his fate more sure; so that no chance should bring victim and executioner together while the former retained the power to speak, and tell the latter what a miscreant he was.

Hark! Yes, there are the cries for which he waits.

"Escape! Escape! The prisoner has escaped!"

Stubbs rushes out of the inn amid the clamour he has himself raised, and urges the men to pursuit in every direction except towards the back of the house. They are soon scattered about, hunting among the woods, the water-courses, behind hay-ricks, and knocking at the doors of the few cottages that are within sight.

"He *must* have heard that noise," thought Lieutenant John Montague Fox to himself. "He must have heard it. No doubt he'll wait a moment or two, to see that all the men have gone, that no one sly lingerer keeps on the watch.

"Yes, now he'll be satisfied. He can see the men through the window. He must be quitting the room by this time—is now probably in the passage—and now he'll have got to the yard?

"Now then, now! When will that sluggard whom I posted in the room above him, fire?

"He waits, perhaps, to make sure of his intention to escape! Idiot! As though any other motive could take him into that place!

"But what am I about? Getting nervous? Pooh! And what's this on my face? Actually the cold sweat beginning to roll down! Ridiculous!

"Still silent! I must go round to the front. I cannot—dare not delay any longer. Were he, through these arrangements of mine, to escape, I might not only be ruined, but my life even pay the forfeit, if anybody (any enemy) charged me with being myself a Jacobite in disguise! Fool, not to have weighed that danger before!

"Ha! he fires! He has killed him! I triumph! The plan was well laid! I triumph!"

Just one half-hour before the lieutenant gave the

signal, as we have just shown, General Langton was sitting in a dark corner of the room, gazing gloomily towards the window and the open country he saw beyond. He could not tell what ailed him, but he seemed to be haunted with all kinds of dark forebodings. He would never reach Hermia alive! Or if he reached her, it would only be to find that she had grown up in the deepest hatred of the Jacobite cause, and would, therefore, never recognise or receive him as her husband. Prolonged illness about to come on, violence on the road as he travelled, recurrence of his late blindness—these and a host of kindred suggestions exercised a perfectly morbid influence upon him, that he could only explain to himself by a reference to the terrible scenes he had that day passed through. But at last he suddenly rose up, and stood still, in an attitude so extraordinary, that an unseen spectator could almost have guessed the kind of thought that had come over him, and paralysed his every movement.

“Is it, can it be?” he half murmured aloud. “Strange! My instincts warned me from the first against this man; and now there seems to come over me, as in an irresistible stream of sure, damning conviction, a score of seeming trifles that tell me, as a whole, this man means to murder me!”

Still standing motionless where he was, as if concentrating every bodily and mental power on the

one idea, "How shall I save myself?" he at last started, went to the bell, and rang it, though taking care to do so very gently.

Just as he had hoped, the girl who had previously waited on him answered the bell. He remembered now that this girl, who was a plain, coarse-featured damsel, but with a kindly expression, and a soft bright eye, had looked at him a good deal, with a sort of wonder and interest, as if inviting him to speak to her.

Not being accustomed to respond to such seemingly flattering advances, he had taken no notice, and she had left the room without speaking to him. Now he wanted to see whether she might not have had quite a different kind of thought from that which he had idly fancied.

She came in, looking this time decidedly agitated; and when Lord Langton, after speaking to her a few careless but kind words, suddenly closed the door and took her hand, she burst into tears almost before he had time to say a word.

"My good girl," he said, "it has always been my faith to trust a woman in my worst dangers. Dare I trust you now?"

"Yes—yes," she sobbed. And then, waiting for no more, but glad to be relieved of her perilous secret, she explained to the horrified soldier his position: that two men were waiting to shoot him

dead—the one from an upper window, who was to kill him the moment he appeared in the back yard; and the other, who was lying among the bushes outside, to kill him if, through any accident, he escaped unhurt through the door when the first man should fire at him. One of these very men—the man upstairs—was her sweetheart, and thus she had discovered the whole secret of the devilish plot.

“Lieutenant Fox,” she added, “is himself waiting outside on the heath near the door, and all his other men are in the front, and they are to be sent to seek for you there when a false alarm of your escape is given.”

“Fiend! monstrous fiend!” cried the soldier. “That very signal he invented for my sake, that I might be sure to find the back of the house unguarded. My dear, noble-minded maiden, take this in recompense;” and he gave her a small piece of money. “And take this too.” And here the soldier gave her a kiss, but with all the air of a devoted courtier saluting a titled dame.

“Now then,” said he, “to finish your good work. You will find a man on horseback leading another horse somewhere in the immediate neighbourhood; he must be very near by this time. Find him and direct him to wait for me at the corner of that wood which I see about a quarter of a mile off, but tell him to keep out of sight. There I will run as fast as my



strength will permit, sheltering myself from observation as well as I can. If you fail to find the man, you can hardly fail to find the horses, for they are waiting somewhere about, ready saddled. Can you ride yourself on an emergency?"

"Ay, that I can—and will, if I don't find your man," was the reply.

"And can you bring me any kind of fire-arm, however rusty, that will go off?"

"You don't want to kill anybody with it?"

"No; I want to fire it, merely to make them think that that is the shot which is to kill me."

"Wait," said the girl, hastily; "I won't be a minute." She stole away on tip-toe, up the stairs, to her lover, and found him so anxious and absorbed at the window that, though he noticed her entrance, he did not suspect her purpose, which was to remove a spare carbine he had placed ready on the floor behind him, just within reach of his hand.

Taking advantage of his putting his head out of the window in his extreme anxiety to discover whether the critical moment was approaching, she was able to achieve her object without discovery.

"Here!" she said, breathlessly, as she glided back into the room, looking as white as a ghost; "here it is! double-barrelled. Promise me you will not fire at the man upstairs, whatever happens. He only obeys orders; and he's—he's—my——"

"Yes, I understand, my dear; and I do promise. Now then, my fate is in your hands. There will not be many more minutes left before the signal will be given, and then I must fly or be captured, which means for me death!"

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! Well, I'm gone; I'll find your horse, trust me, if it is to be found. Good-bye dear, sweet, hapless gentleman. You're a great lord, they say." And then Lord Langton, to hurry her off, was obliged again to give the kiss which was tempting her to stay; the first kiss from a great lord, and so unfortunate a gentleman, having strangely disturbed her imagination.

A shot is fired, and the lieutenant in his moment of triumph, as he hears it, exults in his future fame and fortune.

Would he be dead—quite dead? the lieutenant wondered to himself. A dying man's eye reproaching him was a thing he wouldn't care to have before him through the rest of his life.

"Pooh! what a superstitious ass this business makes of me. I ought to know better, or else keep out of such jobs."

He had got round by this time to the man who was concealed among the bushes; and who, he found, had risen in excitement to tell the lieutenant something was wrong. Neither he nor his partner at the

window had fired, yet somebody had, and the prisoner was making no sign that he was about to come forth.

With curses on his lips, and an almost insane frenzy in his heart, the lieutenant ran round to the front of the house, burst into its passages and rooms, upstairs and downstairs, but no Lord Langton did he find. The prisoner had really escaped!

"My horse, quick! and a carbine. Stubbs," he shouted, "follow me as fast as you can run. Let all the men do the same. We shall be ruined if this man escapes us now." He paused a moment, lost in gloomy thought, while they fetched the horse and the carbine.

Suppose the General did escape—what then? Why, he, the lieutenant, would certainly suffer in his place if it became known that this man was Lord Langton! But why should it be known? He might even now say that he had examined the ear, and found that it was not him. That would effectually protect him if the General escaped, for nobody would trouble their heads about the matter, except in consequence of the lieutenant's own behaviour in connection with the king's proclamation. On the other hand, if he overtook him, captured him, or killed him, it was equally necessary then to prove that the sufferer was General Langton. Cursed position! What should he do? He determined to tell the lie, and invent an excuse

afterwards for unsaying it, if he had the luck even yet to catch his victim.

“Stubbs,” said he, as his subordinate held the horse for him to mount, “I forgot to tell you this is not the man mentioned in the proclamation; I made sure it was till just now, when I saw his ear, and found no mark there. But no doubt he’s a fellow of the same kidney. So, quick; after me to hunt him down.”

The very instant the General had fired the first of the two shots contained in the carbine he saw the men pause in the pursuit, and almost immediately return to the inn. Yes, he saw them fast hurrying, in obedience to their leader’s directions, to the back of the house, which, with its surroundings of garden, yard, outbuildings, &c., stretched over a good piece of ground.

Rapidly General Langton reckoned them up—one, two, three, four, five, six, but there stopped: he saw nothing of the seventh. There were nine in all, including the two marksmen—he was quite sure of that. Where was the ninth? To his inexpressible comfort, while he delayed just half-a-minute after the last of the six returning men had got out of his way, he saw the seventh reappear from out of a water-course, along which he had been hunting. Another half-minute of intense anxiety passed, and Lord

Langton, carbine in hand, was standing in that same water-course alone, stooping low to conceal his head, and hurrying along as fast as his trembling limbs—trembling with weakness, not lack of courage—would let him. As he ran he could hear the hubbub distinctly coming nearer, as though all the men had again got to the front of the inn before starting on a new quest. If any one of them came to the water-course he must see the fugitive, for it was perfectly straight for two or three hundred yards—then it turned. If only he could reach that corner unseen, he would be safe, his route unsuspected, and he would be close to the place where the girl waited with the horse.

Now and then he glanced back and saw no one, and that gave him new strength. He even fancied he could hear, from the sounds of the men calling one to another, that they had got on a false scent. At last he reached the corner, turned once more to see if he were still unpursued, got round it, and dropped down in sheer exhaustion. How his heart was beating—how his head throbbed! And yet, with his physical powers in this state of collapse, never for a single instant did he lose his presence of mind, his patience, or his fortitude.

The moment the turmoil of heart and brain had become a little assuaged—in other words, when the violence of the blood thus driven with undue rapidity

and volume through all the finer passages of the bloodvessels, at the very time when they were in a state of partial congestion, and therefore less than ordinarily fit for the usual tide—when this state of things ceased a little, the soldier rose, dipped his head in a little pool of water that was close by his side, the bed of the stream generally being almost dry, and then walked collectedly away, poising his carbine as coolly as if he were taking his morning's walk.

The girl and a horse were at the appointed place—the former looking positively handsome for the moment, under the vivid colour that these incidents, so full of romance for her, had brought out.

“Have you seen the man?” he asked.

“No, sir, no, my lord,” said she, blushing under his eye.

“My name is Daniel Sterne, and I am a travelling merchant, my good girl. Farewell! May the gratitude of an honest man ever dwell about you, and give you solace in your own misfortunes.”

He then mounted the horse, shook her heartily by the hand, and bade her good-bye, taking no apparent notice of the tears he saw coursing each other down her cheeks.

As he turned his horse's head, he had a new surprise. He saw, scarcely a quarter of a mile off, a horseman, carbine in hand, galloping furiously towards him.

"Lieutenant John Montague Fox!" said the General deliberately to himself, arresting his horse, and beginning quietly to feel that all was right with the piece he held in his hand. "If his piece is double-barrelled like this, I am lost, unless I can draw from him a rapid and useless shot, and then myself make my one shot—the only one left to me—as decisive as it must be quick."

On came the officer, nearer and nearer, evidently knowing nothing of the carbine in the soldier's hand, which he carefully veiled from observation.

When within about fifty yards, the pursuer paused; and there was a suspicious-looking movement of the arm, as if the officer also tried to disguise—not his possession of the piece—but his intention to fire.

At that instant the soldier turned his horse, as if for flight, spurred him violently, and fell flat at full length on the animal's back and neck; and, just as he expected, the lieutenant's carbine was fired, and the shot whistled harmlessly over him.

Wheeling round, even in the animal's greatest speed, he suddenly faced the lieutenant, at the moment the latter was least prepared to fire again; for he was gathering the reins, to urge another rapid advance, and to get nearer, before firing a second time.

"Hold!" shouted the General to him, "or you

are a dead man! At this distance I never miss. Hold! I say. If you raise your weapon, no human power can save you. I offer you your life, worthless as it is, on one condition. Deny all knowledge of me; say you were mistaken; and then it won't be to your interest, my friend, to let anything more be said about the matter."

"I have denied it," shouted the lieutenant, in reply; "so if that's all you want, drop your weapon, and let's have a word of quiet explanation; and then you may go where you like—to the devil if it so please you!"

"Farewell, Lieutenant John Montague Fox; but mind this, if I am caught, either now or hereafter, my very first confession shall be, that King William's zealous and most admirable officer was the man who found me out—and let me go."

"Take that first!" the lieutenant shouted, having, as he fancied, caught an unguarded moment, and fired!

It was a pity, for his own sake. Stung by this new treachery, the General, though he would not fire at him, literally rode him and his horse right down, in a fashion utterly unexpected by the lieutenant. A master of all cavalry movements, the General had no sooner mounted his horse than he perceived, though without then thinking of its importance to him, that the animal was an old military



charger. He rode now point blank at the lieutenant, making his own horse rear at the moment of contact, in a style that was not only terrible to witness but still more terrible to withstand. The shock threw the assailed horse and rider to the earth with tremendous violence, and then the frightened animal got away, leaving the lieutenant helpless on the ground. In vain he sprang to his feet, and strove to grasp the General's rein or bridle. Every attempt of the kind was foiled by a blow from the butt-end of the carbine, till he again, in the agitation and violent movement of the maddened horse—ceaselessly spurred—was cast to the ground, where the General rode his horse right over him once and again. Then he left him in a frightful condition, no limbs actually broken, as it happened—no fatal injuries inflicted—but with so many bruises, and in so many parts of the body, that it was many weeks before the worthy lieutenant was sufficiently recovered to resume his duties.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### A GHASTLY PORTAL.

It was on a raw, gusty morning, the first of December, that the General was set down in the yard of the "Saracen's Head Inn," Snow Hill. He was tired to death with the insufferable tediousness of the journey, through the slow rate of progress when in motion, and through the constant stoppages at inns for rest and refreshment.

But when the heavy, lumbering vehicle reached the suburbs, he grew alert, watchful, wakeful, though he had, during the night, been inclined to sleep. *Here* was the centre of all his intended operations; here was the Dutch king and his court; here were many of the Jacobites who were to be roused once more into opposition! Here probably was his wife.

How strange London seemed to him after his long absence on the continent! He had not seen it since he was sixteen years old. The morning cries of the hawkers stunned him; the incessant throngs of people amazed him; and he fell into quite a reverie as to the power and prospect of this wonderful

British people as he watched those great streams of life ebbing and flowing hither and thither in such rich vitality.

Where was his new acquaintance, the Mercer's apprentice? was his first question, as he alighted from the coach, and stretched his limbs, and shook himself.

While standing at the entrance of the inn-yard, and looking about him, his eyes were drawn towards a young man who stood by an open window talking to a pretty barmaid, with his back to the General.

She was inside, and was pulling a bell to summon the passengers by the nine o'clock coach. The young man, standing outside in the yard, was thrusting his staff into the bell, as it hung above him, to prevent its ringing—a proceeding which caused much confusion and noise in the already noisy yard. The pretty barmaid blushed, and raved, and pulled; the coachman swore, and demanded, in all sorts of names, why the signal was not given; the few punctual passengers who had already taken their seats, growled and grumbled at the delay, and sent looks that were anything but friendly at the upper window, where those who were to be their fellow-travellers sat placidly finishing their breakfasts, or waiting for the bell to warn them that the coach was ready to start.

In the figure of the mischief-maker the General

fancied he recognised the apprentice. Nor was he mistaken. When the youth turned round, he saw the face of George Osborne, always frank and genial, now full of harmless merriment. His dress was as smart as possible to be still within 'prentice rules; but, in spite of its present merriment, the face was pale and a little weary-looking, as if from late hours.

Approaching the window, and touching the young man's stick with his own, he said—

“What! a damsel in distress! Come, sir, come. Give over, or Sir Richard Constable shall hear of it.”

The young man dropped his stick and looked round in astonishment. The bell rang; there was a clatter of knives and forks being thrown down, a hurrying of feet, rushing of boots and chambermaids to the hall, a hundred demands for bills, boxes, and shawls, and, in the midst of the din, George Osborne and Daniel Sterne became once more known to each other.

Guided by the apprentice, the General now went past Newgate, past the new cathedral of St. Paul's, now nearly finished, then through Cheapside, towards London Bridge, where the Mercer's place of business was.

As they walked along, the General was glad to take George's arm, not only because he could then

the better hear him speak, but because his recent illness had still left him languid, and rather unfitted for rude contact with the very rude elements of London street life.

He found George a bright, quick, impulsive, eager youth, a little touched, perhaps, with the knowingness of cockney life, and especially of apprentice life ; but still sensitive, with gleams of modesty and respect for things lying out of the range of his own experience, that made the General augur favourably of him, and feel new interest in him, for his own sake ; apart from the fact of his connection with the Mercer and of the priceless service rendered to himself.

One trait much amused him, George's desire to be understood as belonging, like himself, " to the pomp and circumstance of glorious war," for he was a foot soldier in the City Train-bands, and proud of the position.

While he was listening to some of the many bits of gossip about things or people they were passing, with a keen enjoyment of George's good-humoured fun and sarcasm, he noticed his countenance change. The General turned to see who it was that the apprentice had suddenly noticed in this way, and he beheld a lady, very young, very handsome, dressed in the extremest fashion of the time. An immense lace-work pyramid in three square

stages, narrowing as they rose, was upon her head. Her cherry-coloured stomacher, laced with blue and silver, went down to a point below her waist, and there was met by a large ornament glittering with precious stones. The petticoat of the same intense colour, was flowered all over with the *fleur de lis*, and displayed to the utmost advantage, by the gown, of the softest dove colour, being looped or festooned back, so as to fall entirely behind in along train, where it was looped across below the hips in the not very modest or graceful fashion one sees revived to-day. She was passing out from a goldsmith's shop—they were now in Cheapside—to the sedan-chair that had been waiting for her, and kissed her hand, as she did so, to George; who bowed deeply, then coloured, and then tried, but in vain, for a minute or two to resume the conversation with Mr. Sterne.

This incident disturbed the General's growing satisfaction with George. Who could the lady be? A lady of quality, apparently. If so, what possible motive could she have for thus recognising a Mercer's apprentice?

While ruminating over this, an odd thought occurred to him that he had himself seen the lady before; where, he could not for the life of him imagine; unless, indeed, it was that young lady he had met at Paris, when going into his hotel, and whose fan he had picked up and handed to her, but

of whom he had not, otherwise, taken the slightest notice. The incident, however, soon passed from his mind, and was altogether forgotten under the impression produced by the spectacle that shortly met his eyes.

As they approached London Bridge—old London Bridge, then covered with a dense, continuous mass of houses from end to end, with only a sort of narrow roadway through the centre—the hurry and the roar became so great that it was impossible to hear a word said.

As they were about to advance to the entrance-arch, George and the General paused ; and the former, pointing to something above it that the General could not clearly make out, asked his companion if he recognised what it was.

“No,” said the General, his sight being still a little dim. “I have been over London Bridge once or twice as a boy, but I have no remembrance of anything special ; what makes you put the question to me ?”

“They are heads—human heads, or the remains of them, mounted on very long iron poles.”

“Good heavens ! what for ?”

“They are the heads of the chief rebels who have been executed at different times for rebellion.”

“My father’s most intimate friends, his fellow-conspirators most likely among them !” inly mur-

mured the General. "My father, might have been here too, but for his escape after the Monmouth affair. And I shall, I suppose, present the same grim spectacle if I make the slightest slip in my present business. Now, George, let us hurry through this ghastly portal. Where is your master's shop?"



## CHAPTER XIV.

### A LONDON MERCER.

SIR RICHARD CONSTABLE, George's master, had been knighted by King James only a year or two before his flight, on some occasion of public ceremony and rejoicing in the City. Since then he had been, as George had managed to suggest rather than explain to the General, somewhat under a cloud, as regards the government's favour; who supposed him secretly inclined towards the Jacobite cause.

In all other respects he was a very popular man among the citizens, and respected even by his enemies at court.

On the day of the General's arrival in London, Sir Richard dined at his business-house on the bridge; and at the moment when George Osborne appeared there in the domestic apartments, which were still kept in order and handsomeness, though he lived almost entirely at Blackheath, the Mercer was not in the best of tempers. The sirloin had been overdone, the pasties, too, were burnt, the heavy old servitor had thrice trodden on Sir Richard's

toes, he had grumbled all dinner-time, and his daughter had answered him with perfect sweetness:—in fact, he had been very much tried.

When George was admitted to his master's presence, he found him sulkily drinking his wine alone at the great table; while his daughter, the fair Christina, stood in the quaint, ecclesiastical-looking window, looking down the river.

While Sir Richard took his own time to become aware of his presence, George looked at the young lady, who was more gaily dressed than he had ever seen her, having, that morning, been on the river with some ladies of fashion. The apprentice looked at her dress with admiration, but rather avoided looking at her face when she turned and smiled upon him faintly.

It was a face he knew only too well, with a delicate and pure beauty, and soft brown eyes, beaming with love and sweetness. The kind looks of those eyes were the only woman's looks that George had ever tried to forget. The light of those eyes, though it shone in warm and sweet upon his very heart, was not a flattering light, but seemed to show spots where it shone—spots invisible to George, except when those eyes were upon him.

So when he found them looking towards him that afternoon, he bent his own on Sir Richard's ruffled brow, and delivered his message.

The merchant heard his account of Daniel Sterne in silence, and George had an uncomfortable consciousness that his eyes were resting rather satirically on a pair of new and un'prentice-like buckles, which he had tried to conceal by standing behind a chair.

"Are they paid for, George?" asked Sir Richard, pointing at them with a smile that the young man liked even less than the question.

He coloured, and tried to conceal his confusion beneath a show of respectful indignation.

"Are they paid for?" repeated Sir Richard, more sternly.

"They will be, sir," stammered George.

"Will be, sir! will be!" thundered his master, letting out all the anger he had been saving for his cook; "then walk out with them, sir, and let me never see them again till they are paid for, at your peril. Will be, indeed!" said he, as the door closed on George. "Of all things I hate a 'prentice dandy, Teena!"

He listened with his hand on the chair-arm, for he had heard something behind him very like a sigh.

He looked round, and then the cloud of ill-humour cleared off what was usually a very pleasant, benevolent, and bright face, and a look of gentleness and contrition came over it.

"Teena," said he again, in a kind and anxious

voice, "didn't I tell you not to stay here? Didn't I warn you that the old fellow who you say is kind to you at Blackheath, was a cross beast on London Bridge?"

A pair of soft arms were laid round his neck, and a brown head on his shoulder, while a pained girlish voice cried—

"No, no! I like coming with you; you are kind to me—always so kind; but why so cruel to—to——"

"To George? Well, Teena, *I* don't wish to be cruel, any more than I wish you to be kind; and I don't wish you to be kind to him, because he is not worthy of your kindness: not because he's a 'prentice—I was a 'prentice, I like 'prentices—but because he's a useless fellow, clever, but lazy—lazy, Teena, hopelessly lazy, and a dandy. So my little girl must be thinking of some of those worthy gentlemen who pretend to think so much of her, and forget a good-for-nothing rascal, who——Yes, yes, coming!" he shouted, angrily, to an assistant. "There, there, now," added Sir Richard, rising and kissing her fondly; "get rid of these tears, put on your best bravery, and we'll go to the play to-night, at Mr. Betterton's new theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and see Betterton himself in Hamlet."

Christina sat by herself when he had gone, looking at the place where George had stood.

“Would I like to forget if I could?” said she, dreamily.

What was it that Christina could not forget : that made a sensitive, retiring, modest girl, love one beneath her rank, who had never spoken a single word to her to justify her feeling toward him ? She knew that her father suspected her secret, and was irritable whenever she gave him any cause to think of it. She saw, too, that his own liking for George and faith in him seemed to change to dislike and to suspicion, as her faith and inclination deepened into love. The causes were simple enough :—

George Osborne had twice in his brief life, saved others from destruction : the General, as has been recently shown, and Christina, while she was but a child of eleven, and he a boy of fourteen. The Mercer had taken the boat for the day to go down the river with three or four friends ; Christina and George the new apprentice, accompanying them : the former as a richly-dressed young lady of distinction, brought out from school almost for the first time into the world ; the latter, in accordance with the customs of the time, which made even gentlemen’s sons often act as apprentices and servitors without losing caste, to wait upon the others.

The day—May-day—was one of the most enjoyable character—alike as regards the weather and the persons in the boat. George’s bright face, assiduity,

and quickness had made everyone pleased with him; and charmed the happy girl, who needed some central figure in the lovely romance which she seemed to be passing through.

Suddenly, while the Mercer, his friend the doctor, and two ladies were singing a madrigal with true musical feeling and enjoyment, there was felt a concussion, followed by a scream from Christina, cries of alarm from the two ladies, and before any of the persons in the boat had time to discover the origin of the shock, they all found themselves in the water, struggling for life.

The authors of the mischief—a party of revellers who, in crossing the river, had come abruptly on the Mercer's boat from behind a barge—did their best to save the drowning persons; and managed—although the tide was flowing swiftly—to get hold of the Mercer and the two ladies, leaving, however, the doctor, and the child Christina to be carried away: the latter borne up, and conspicuous by her white dress.

The two sailors who had managed the boat clung to it, as the chief thing they had to think of—it was their all; and the help rendered them by a vessel passing by enabled them to get it righted, and to start after the missing persons. The doctor had found safety in a life-buoy that had been thrown overboard to him, as he was seen to pass; but

where was Christina, and where was the apprentice ?

They were just reaching the shore together ; Christina senseless, but borne along by George, how he hardly knew himself ; for as he subsequently remembered, once he caught her dress in his teeth, and once he could only lift her head and turn her round with her face to the sky ; but finally he managed to support and guide her in a diagonal line gradually towards the shore, till he could touch the ground with his feet, and feel his burden and himself were both safe.

Remembering these things now, a tear rolled down Christina's face, and she shook her head, and said to herself—

“Nay, it is misery to love him—misery. Oh, sometimes what misery ! But 'tis easier to love than to forget. There is no comfort in forgetting, but there is much comfort in loving, even like this.”

The Mercer found his shop filled with fashionable ladies, and saw, standing near the door, a rather tall, and very striking-looking man, whom he set down at once as a person of rank and distinction ; but was surprised to find from George that the gentleman was his correspondent,—the travelling commercial agent from Harwich, who had come to offer him a quantity of thrown silk.

Noticing then, for the first time, his dress, he saw

that he was not in the garb of a fashionable man of the day, and he wondered why he had made such a mistake as to his position. But even as he was about to advance and speak to him, he saw the person in question move out of the way to allow a lady and a child to pass—he having unconsciously obstructed them for a moment—and the movement was made with so much grace and dignity, and with a half smile of apology, that again the Mercer wondered, and reverted to his former impression.

His own mode of address, when he did speak to Mr. Daniel Sterne, was thus unconsciously influenced to a tone and manner of unusual respect.

“You would like to speak with me?” the Mercer said, looking him steadily and earnestly in the face.

“If you please,” was the reply, “I am yet new to business of this kind——”

There was a pause at these words, and the Mercer fancied there lurked some peculiar meaning below the words intended only for his own ear.

But why had the General paused in his speech so abruptly? It was because he had heard a name which sent the blood rushing to his heart.

Presently the Mercer heard it too. It was a servant in rich livery, who had spoken. He had previously entered the shop, and had been waiting till he could get nearer to the counter. He now repeated what he said—



“Lady Hermia Bridgeminster is waiting in her coach at the end of the bridge, and will feel obliged by Sir Richard’s coming to speak to her just for a moment.”

Sir Richard forgot his other visitor, ran back to look at a glass in the little parlour, and to adjust his wig, then hurried out into the throng to obey the command of the daughter of the distinguished nobleman on whose favour the merchant placed great reliance, to overcome the prejudices connected with his knightly title.

As to General Langton, he stood, leaning back in a little dark recess of the shop, unable to determine, in the profound agitation of the moment, what this unexpected meeting could mean—both coming to the same man to consult him at the same moment. He was still less able to decide whether he would stay where he was, or venture after the Mercer, and endeavour to catch one look of her face, one tone of her voice—himself the while unknown, unsuspected.

## CHAPTER XV.

### WARNINGS.

THE Mercer found the coach drawn a little aside in a corner at the entrance of the bridge ; and he hastened to the door, which was open, to pay his respects to the lady within.

She did not notice his arrival. She sat, leaning back, her side turned towards him, her eyes gazing dreamily through an opening that revealed the river and its forest of masts, which seemed to exercise a powerful charm over her thoughts.

What a wondrously beautiful face it was ! And yet you could not think of the beauty on account of its other qualities—the regal dignity, and the tragic expression, that was scarcely less regal in its sorrow, elevation, and self-control.

The Mercer paused before that noble yet sad picture, wondering what events could have thus affected the life of a lady so richly endowed by God with the finest natural gifts of her sex, as well as with all the advantages of rank and fortune.

He did not like to speak or to cough, but waited

humbly till she should turn; and then he heard her sigh, and it was a sigh the Mercer could not forget for many a day, and which he and Teena speculated about that night till they were weary.

When she did turn, and saw the bowing Mercer, there was a slight flush came over her countenance, as if conscious she had been looked on; and for a moment Sir Richard saw a gathering cloud of haughty displeasure. But the Mercer's respectful and manly face checked this; and then, with a smile so strangely sweet that it thrilled through the Mercer's very soul, and half touched him to tears, while remembering what he had seen and heard, she began to speak:—

“Dear Sir Richard, you will, I am sure, forgive me for not coming into your treasury of beautiful things this morning, not even to see my young friend Teena, who is, I hear, in town to-day. Give my kindest regards to her, and say I shall send her a summons soon, which must be obeyed, to spend a few days with me in Yorkshire. But I am not well now—not in spirits; and I have a little business in hand about which I thought it best to communicate with you alone.”

The merchant bowed, and wondered at the increase of seriousness visible in the face and palpable in the speech of the young lady.

“Have you any especial reason to believe there

are enemies of yours, Sir Richard—men at once so full of hate and so contemptible, that they would injure you by any kind of device ?”

“Certainly not, my lady. I have given no reason for such enmities. I am a man of business, and people give me credit for having a tolerably keen eye to my business while struggling among a host of competitors, but that’s a fair and legitimate war, all above board ; and we citizens, after contests in the morning of that kind, can meet and give each other a cordial welcome in the evening. No, my lady, I cannot believe I have enemies among the men of my own craft, and what other enemies can I have ?”

“But politics, Sir Richard.”

“Politics, my lady ! even in that I am not notorious as an ardent or fanatical person. I support what I believe to be the rights of the people, without trenching on the rights and privileges of the court or of the government ; and, in a word, my lady, I may say I am rather popular than otherwise, even in my own ward, and generally among the freemen of the metropolis.”

“Certainly, Sir Richard ; and that is why the earl, my father, has been so anxious for you to be elected to the next Parliament as one of the City members ; and why he has been looking forward to your coming mayoralty for an opportunity to confer

a signal honour on you, in the shape of a king's visit, which would be followed by a baronetcy. Such a favour from our gracious sovereign would at once remove any unfavourable impression left by the gift of his enemy—James."

"A baronetcy! Ah, my lady, had my poor boy lived, that would, indeed, have been a noble prize! But as it is——"

"Well, but, Sir Richard, there is Teena. She will marry, no doubt, by-and-by. Probably your honours may be passed on to her descendants."

The Mercer's eyes—always bright ones—literally blazed at this stroke. Obviously, if the Lady Hermia—or, rather, if the Earl of Bridgeminster, whose policy he felt sure the daughter was only carrying out in her own quiet, sympathetic way—had sought an angel's counsel to tell them how to win the Mercer soul and body, this was the exact method. With some agitation that he felt to be unmanly, but which he could not control, he said—

"My dear lady, would—would that be practicable?"

"Certainly, if my father sets his mind upon it. You know, perhaps, he is now the king's most cherished adviser; even though he occupies, at his own wish, a comparatively modest post."

"And may I hope that the most devoted service to the earl—always saving my clear duties to my

fellow-citizens—may justify me in—in looking—to——”

“You might have done so, Sir Richard, till some very recent day, or hour, or minute, when an event occurred, the nature of which is hidden from me, but above which, I see, hangs great danger for you.”

“Danger! Me! My lady!”

“Yes, Sir Richard; not, perhaps, directly, but certainly indirectly.”

“May I entreat your ladyship to receive from me the most earnest protestations that whatever may be the nature of these charges—made in secret, as I gather, against me—they are absolutely, mischievously, and wickedly untrue? I pledge myself to that before even the remotest idea enters my mind as to their character.”

“Is that possible, Sir Richard? You cannot even guess? Pray consider—not the present, merely, but the past.”

The Mercer’s face fell. Ah, yes! if the past were to be raised like a grim spectre before him, then, indeed, there were things that had happened many, many years ago, that would expose him to great trouble, loss, and danger.

The Mercer had been, like a very large proportion of his countrymen, a decided Jacobite; but, like them, he had had the excellent sense to see, at a certain period, that a time had arrived when

patriotism itself demanded the transfer of allegiance to the cause of King William, and then he did manfully transfer it; and he had been true and faithful ever since. What devil of mischief could there be evoking the past against him now—with what object—and what particular facts were they trying to prove against him?

Seeing his trouble, Lady Hermia came to his relief:—

“Sir Richard, if I did not feel a real respect for you, and real affection for your sweet daughter, I would not have so much alarmed you. But I may, I think, now assure you that if you have only the past to deal with, you are safe. My father and his brother statesmen are not so foolish or”—“criminal,” she might have been going to add, but remembering her father’s antecedents, checked herself—“as to evoke new strifes when every true-hearted Englishman and Englishwoman wishes to allay them. My warning, therefore, relates to the future. Oh, Sir Richard! if the slightest remains of your old feeling for the Stuarts exist in your heart—which I should honour if it did—still do not, I entreat you, for Teena’s sake, be seduced into giving way to it, should events now occur to raise once more the dreadful standard of civil war, and give for a brief period a seeming probability of success. Bad news has lately reached the govern-

ment. Why should I not tell it you in confidence? It is believed, then, that the French are going to lend James an army; and that General Langton under the nominal command of the Duke of Berwick is to lead them, and is expected shortly to land. And—and—and——”

Here it was Lady Hermia's turn to grow pale, confused, and, at last, silent. And the two remained for perhaps half-a-minute, each buried in sad and agitating thought; though what Lady Hermia felt at the mention of the proposed leader of the French, the Mercer had, of course, not the slightest idea of speculating about.

The Mercer was the first to recover, and it was noticeable how dignified and manly he became in this time of danger. He belonged, indeed, to the race of those tradesmen-heroes of which the civic records are full—men working up from the humblest beginnings, patient, frugal, self-denying, clever, keen in business, devoted seemingly to business alone, till, lo! suddenly, out they come as great philanthropists, building magnificent halls, colleges, schools, and hospitals; or as patriots, resisting arbitrary governmental encroachments to-day, and striking a Wat Tyler to the ground to-morrow; lending money to sovereigns, feasting sovereigns, becoming able warriors, and rising, in many instances, into the peerage at last.



Sir Richard was one of these men in feeling, though not perhaps in power. He showed the civic training now when he said—

“My dear lady—if I may be pardoned so familiar an expression in consideration of my boundless gratitude for the precious service and the high honour you have this day done me—will you believe me if I swear to you that, beyond a mere ideal affection personally to my old sovereign, I have not the smallest inclination towards his service as a king; nay, that I do in my conscience believe that nothing could be more wicked, and I am sure, nothing more sure to be justly punished, than would be a new outbreak? May I, then, ask you to convey, in your own kind and wise words, to my honoured lord your father the proffer of my entire devotion of soul and body, purse and estate, to the service of the present government, now so happily established, and in a loyal spirit to my own monarch, King William, whom I pray the Almighty, in His infinite mercy, to bless and to preserve from every kind of danger?”

“Sir Richard, I believe you—I do, indeed! And I suppose,” she added, with that old, enchanting smile, “I suppose I must make the earl believe it too; so if you do turn traitor, it is I who will be one of your victims.”

She stretched out her hand, with its long, taper-

ing, delicately-beautiful fingers, and the Mercer pressed his lips upon them, And then, as he was preparing respectfully to withdraw, he saw something in her face that arrested him, and which something presently took the form of a question, put very carelessly, and as if Lady Hermia, while her eye noted a superb barge, with music playing, that was passing down the river, hardly knew or cared what she was saying—

“This General Langton, do you know him personally?”

“No, my lady,” said the Mercer; but the “No” was not said till after a decided pause, as if the Mercer were a little fencing with the question.

However that might be, Lady Hermia did not repeat the question; and Sir Richard closed the door, bowed, and saw the coach drive off, while he returned, threading his way through the throng, utterly regardless of Daniel Sterne, the crowd, his business, and his daughter, in the serious thoughts Lady Hermia’s visit had raised.

Our readers may readily judge that Sir Richard was no longer in a mood for sentimental politics when he again confronted Daniel Sterne.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### AN UNWELCOME FRIEND.

THE Mercer was so absorbed and so forgetful of his usual courtesy on returning to the shop, as to ask the person who had been so long waiting for him, bluntly, before all the people there, the nature of his business; as if he expected him to explain it in the presence of all those ladies, who were so busy handling the Mercer's treasures; and whose sweet, silvery, ringing, and multitudinous voices made up a very pretty, though rather distracting chorus.

"I have a sample of thrown silk I have brought from Italy, if you will permit me to show it to you," and then the speaker's eye glanced towards the inner room, where he could just see the gleam of an open window, and a graceful head in front of it at work.

"Really, I am very busy to-day——"

"I don't think, Sir Richard, I shall detain you long. Our bargain will, I doubt not, be a very brief one, though it may lead to more advantageous ones in the future."

That was true, thought Sir Richard. He wanted silk, as much as he could get, at a certain price; so he led the way into the parlour, where the young lady rose to receive the visitor, curtsied, and withdrew; though not without stealing a second look at that very striking face, which she could not forget for some time after, and which made her almost wish she had waited.

As to General Langton himself, he, too, it appeared, did not always look on beautiful women with eyes so unmoved as those that had seen and passed by the fascinations of Miss Maria Modena Preston. His look was arrested at once by Christina; his eyes followed her till the door excluded her from sight, and then he found he had forgotten, for the moment, even the all-important business that had brought him.

For a moment, however, only. He turned; there stood the Mercer waiting, evidently impatient. Now was to be his first great trial, as to the success or failure of his mission.

He proceeded gently; showed a sample of the silk, offered to allow the whole quantity to be carefully examined by the Mercer's people, and only stipulated that the Mercer should fix a price—as high a one as he could afford to pay.

Sir Richard hummed and hah'd a little at that unbusiness-like proceeding, but eventually named a

price, which left a fair margin of profit. Daniel Sterne smiled, took from his pocket the invoice showing what he had paid, and that a very small profit was left, and then the bargain was concluded.

This behaviour roused the Mercer again to a consciousness of his first notion about this Daniel Sterne—and roused him so effectually, that he began to speak in quite an altered tone, and, Daniel Sterne thought, not in a very pleasing one.

“Mr. Sterne, pardon me the observation, but if you mean to succeed as a man of business, you must do your own work in future negotiations—ask your own price, abide by it, and leave other men to do theirs—which is to say, ‘We accept,’ or, ‘We reject.’”

“Your remark is just, and I am not sorry, Sir Richard, to hear it made. Can you not guess why?”

The words might have meant little, but for the accompanying movement. The speaker went to the door, closed it very gently, returned, and again spoke in a low, clear, and strangely significant voice.

“Sir Richard, permit me to tell you a short story——”

“I—I—” began Sir Richard, almost in a tone of anger, for there was a great dread growing over him, as he remembered Lady Hermia’s revelation, and gazed on this mysterious stranger.

"In the terrible year of the Monmouth rebellion——"

As these words were uttered, the Mercer said, loudly—

"Stop, sir—beware! I know not what it is you want to say to me, nor do I wish to know. I am a faithful subject of King William, and am willing to believe you are the same. Let this talk, then, cease. Stay! I will fetch you the money for this purchase; and then, Mr. Sterne, I beg that all further transactions cease between us."

"Sir Richard, I am here in the eyes of the world as a mere man of business—Mr. Daniel Sterne, recommended to you by a man of business; therefore, no possible danger can attach to a brief conversation now we have met—and are alone!"

The travelling merchant had now actually interposed between the Mercer and the door.

"You do not intend to do violence on me in my own house?"

"Oh, Sir Richard, you will be sorry when you hear that which I have to say—and which you must hear."

"Must!"

"I have said it," observed Daniel Sterne, in a tone of quiet composure.

"I will not speak to you, unless before witnesses," said the Mercer, passionately; for the keen sense of

impending danger was growing in intensity each moment.

"Then, for your own sake, let it be before one *you* can trust!" said Daniel Sterne; and so full of meaning was the tone, that the Mercer paused a moment irresolutely, before coming to a decision. Then he went to fetch his daughter Christina, who came back a terrible picture of alarm—not at anything her father had said to her, but at the agitation of his manner, and his sudden demand for her presence.

"Christina," he said, as they both confronted the terrible stranger, who still looked in Christina's eyes anything but terrible personally, "Christina, this man—this—this gentleman—has come to me professedly on business. I have purchased his silk; and now he demands converse with me on quite other matters, and begins by a reference to that terrible time which no loyal Englishman can ever bear now to talk about, the Monmouth insurrection. Witness, then, for me, my child, since he compels me to listen, under what circumstances it is I listen, and that I am absolutely ignorant of his name, of his object, or of his right thus to intrude upon me."

With a glance of still deeper interest at the young lady, and a few words of the most touching apology, Mr. Daniel Sterne resumed, as follows:—

"Sir Richard, at the time of the insurrection there

was a tradesman who espoused the duke's cause. He was a man of humble condition, but of a generous mind and devoted loyalty. He made great sacrifices for the party, even while at its worst. He rendered, also, great personal services to some of the chiefs who were engaged on that side. One of those chiefs—shall I name him?" And Daniel Sterne paused for a reply.

"Do and say just what you like, under your own responsibility. I will take care you shall not make me responsible," was the Mercer's heated and hasty reply.

"The son of Viscount Langton, then, owed his escape from Sedgmoor to a foreign land to that humble, generous, noble-minded tradesman; and when he got abroad, he zealously watched for some opportunity of repaying his benefactor. It came. He was able to communicate beforehand to him a piece of political news that was certain to strike confusion into the dealings of the Stock Exchange when it should be known. The news was safely and secretly received, and the tradesman within one week became rich.

"I am told, Sir Richard, that since then he has been made an alderman, has been knighted, is going shortly to be lord mayor; and that now I, on behalf of the soldier so benefited (who subsequently became Viscount Langton on the death of his father) may personally thank this good man, in thanking Sir



Richard Constable, for his devotion to my father, lately deceased. I am General Viscount Langton."

The Mercer listened intently, and for a few seconds after the General ceased there was a silence so deep as to be painful; and Christina gazed from one to the other—full of admiration for both—but full of fear and wonder as to how this dangerous interview was to end. The Mercer paused no longer in his dismay. His brow cleared, the old, handsome, broad Saxon smile came back. He approached, and held out his hand.

"You the son of the Honourable James Langton! You that handsome slim youth that I saw once, and once only, when you were polishing your sword, and telling me your father had given you permission to join in the very next battle, which, happily, was never fought. Oh, my dear, dear friend, forgive me all my rudeness, all my selfishness, and let me welcome you, with all my heart, to my house!"

Cordial indeed was the grasp that was now exchanged; but the General would not accept the hospitality thus offered, without further explanations.

"Sir Richard, if I startle you in what I am about to say, I do it only in obedience to a solemn duty. Let me, then, whisper to you that I have accepted a mission, which only to explain is death, if overheard."

"Then can you ask me to hear it?" gasped the Mercer, dropping faintly into a chair.

"Yes, in my father's name, and in the name of your once-recognised king, I think I have a right to ask you to listen to what I have to say; and then I accept your decision as final, even if adverse."

"It is terribly perilous work," said the Mercer, pulling off his wig, and wiping the sweat from his bald brow. "However, in heaven's name, out with it, and let's have an end!"

"I was coming, Sir Richard, on purely private business, when I was expressly asked by His Majesty——"

"Can't you call him something else?"

"We won't quarrel about trifles," said the General, with a smile. "I was asked to consult while in England with certain noblemen and gentlemen known to be, or, at least, to have been, devoted to the right cause."

"Which *I* think the wrong one *now*," interposed the Mercer.

"In order to learn whether they were, or would be, prepared to guarantee an English rising; at the same time that we were prepared to guarantee another Scotch rising; and both to be aided by a French army, which might or might not be under my command."

"Don't show me the list! For God's sake don't

show me the list!" exclaimed the excited Mercer, wondering more and more at the timely nature of Lady Hermia's warning.

"I will not," said the General, calmly. "But tell me, could I with such a mission do other than I have done—come to the only man that I had any strong personal feeling for in England, to ask him, as one who *was* a devoted adherent, what chances there are of success before I compromise so many parties by going to see them?"

It was an embarrassing question. The General put it so frankly, and with such entire faith in what ought to be the answer, that the Mercer, while he wished most devoutly Lord Langton had gone in any other direction, could not find the heart to blame the step. And now again the Mercer rose with the position.

"My dear young friend," he said, putting his arm upon the General's shoulder, and leading him to the window; "look there, upon England's argosies going to and fro between us and the world's most distant shores. What will civil war do for them? Or go with me now upon our Exchange—converse with our merchants, our brokers, our bankers, and ask them what will be the first effects of civil war. Then I will take you to our growing factories of silk, to our mines, to our inventors, who are now raising up for us new and stupendous powers in the first develop-

ment of engines moved by steam, which act as by a miracle. I will take you among our scientific men, artists, literary men, musicians, and everywhere you shall find the same significant sight: the signs and tokens of the beginning of a grand industrial movement that shall raise our country in the rank of nations, give new modes of livelihood to our poor, new developments for future use of the latent power and glory of this our own dear country, England!"

"Ay, dear indeed!" said the General, with a sigh.

"Well, now, are we to unsettle all this once more for the sake of a single man or a single family? You cannot deny—at least, I never did—the wrong done by the Stuarts in their arbitrary moods."

"No, I do not deny it."

"Well, then, who are we, to interfere with what may be God's own punishment for those wrongs, by striving to undo the actual state of things by insurrections? England is prosperous—for the most part happy; wants peace only to become infinitely great. Death, then, say I to the traitors who let loose the dogs of war, at such a time, in so purely personal a cause!"

The General listened in gloomy silence. What could he say in remonstrance? The Mercer's thoughts had been in some measure his own thoughts,

though he had not felt it wrong to accept the mission in token of past fidelity.

Christina again glanced with ever increasing interest at the face of this stranger, who exercised an inexplicable charm over her. She—the sweet, modest maiden—found herself gazing earnestly, admiringly, almost passionately, on a man whom she had never heard of before; and gazing without the least consciousness of any kind of impropriety, while wishing earnestly that George Osborne had been there present.

The Mercer, with some tact, managed to arrest the conversation for a moment or two, during which they all sat and took wine, and were all glad of the occupation this gave them. At last the Mercer spoke again, his face full of the kindest sympathy—

“Do you understand your position while engaged in this sort of business?”

“Yes, you may arrest me—perhaps think you ought to do so.”

“God knows, I fear I ought! I do fear I ought! but God knows I will not; not if my own life pay the forfeit! But come, time passes. The position must be changed, and decisively. You have told me a story, let me tell you one, brief as the drop of an axe on the executioner’s block:—Just four years ago, a man of noble character, devoted to the cause, undertook simply to carry papers from England to

France, in furtherance of a plot for insurrection: he was not the author of the plot, nor mixed up with it in any way, except as I have said. He declared with his dying breath he did not even know the nature of the papers he carried. Yet that man was caught, tried, found guilty, and executed, because he would not betray his comrades; while the real contrivers did betray right and left, and were saved."

"You refer to poor Ashton, and the Preston Plot?"

"I do. And your fate would be as absolutely hopeless were you and your mission now discovered. I even see slight reason to think it possible your mission is, in part, discovered, though I can tell you no more."

"Well, Sir Richard, the lion is in my path, and must be confronted. I must fulfil my engagement, unless you like to consider my list, and can convince me from your own absolute knowledge that these parties have already made their peace with the Government!"

"No, no, put it away! Destroy it!"

"Nay, Sir Richard, the list is not yet written, save in my brain."

"Keep it there. I conjure you make no movement. Stay with me for a few days, at all events. During that time I ask you not to speak or write

one word—scarcely even to think one thought—about your mission ; but to look about with your own eyes, and ask whether all you behold is to be turned, as it soon may be, into a howling wilderness by detestable war.”

“I accept your hospitality, and pledge myself, first, that I have, as yet, made no movement of any kind, beyond that of getting to you ; and that I will not even contemplate any movement while I am under your roof !”

“Thanks ! thanks ! Did you also hear the story of Mrs. Gaunt ?”

“No. My life from England has been spent mostly abroad, and in the engrossing occupation of war in the service of the King of France, as the ally of my own sovereign, so that I am ignorant of much that as an Englishman I ought to know.”

“I have told you a story which bears hardly on the principle and humanity of our present rulers. Let me tell you another, for which your side is responsible :—A man—Burton, I think, was the monster’s name—who had been mixed up with plots against Charles II., came as a fugitive to Mrs. Gaunt, an aged Baptist lady, renowned for her charity and goodness. She concealed him till, with the means she furnished, he was able to go abroad. After a time he returned, fought for Monmouth, like your father at Sedgemoor, and then once more flying for

his life, obtained shelter with Fernley, a poor barber in Whitechapel. This man well knew a reward was offered for Burton that would make him a rich man, if he would betray him. Can you guess what happened? Burton knowing the disposition of your royal master, that he looked upon the concealing of traitors as a worse crime even than the treason itself, went to the Government, denounced both Fernley and Mrs. Gaunt: the poor barber was hanged,—the kind lady burnt! I see you are horrified. Inquire, I pray you, into the truth of this unquestionable fact; and then judge whether I am likely ever again to stir hand or foot in behalf of such a king."

"And what of Glencoe and your king?" asked the General, but in a tone which betrayed more of emotion than impatience and indignation.

"It was, I do not deny it, an atrocious deed; and may heaven deal with those who are really responsible for it, as they deserve. But does not all this say to every man of patriotic soul, 'Keep where you are, if in honour you can do so?' Unless the noblest of wars, civil wars are, in my opinion, the vilest. My dear General, you know my danger as well as your own, and I trust you implicitly to do that which you have promised. In my child's presence I ask you to repeat that solemn engagement."

"I do, in the sight of God!" responded the General, fervently.



## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE CHAPEL OF ST. THOMAS.

It was decided between the Mercer and General Langton that the latter, to keep up more perfectly his assumed character, should receive no sort of personal attentions from the former, except in occasional visits to the house at Blackheath; whither Sir Richard would invite him in the presence of his own people, on the assumed ground of his having been a great traveller; and of his being able, therefore, to speak of all sorts of matters, commercial and otherwise, in which the Mercer was interested. The consequence of this was that the General was obliged to take up his abode in the Mercer's house of business, surrounded with the noise and hubbub of London at their greatest point of intensity; and where his sleeping chamber was a great attic, shared with George, though possessing the luxury of a pallet-bed for each.

But the General became greatly interested in his present place of abode when George had taken him all over it. It had originally been a chapel,

dedicated to St. Thomas à Becket, and the whole of the external walls remained, but with additional parts built out here and there. Within those external walls the chapel consisted originally of two parts—an upper chapel, and a lower chapel, or crypt. The crypt was about twenty feet high; the groined roof was supported by several clustered columns of great beauty, and it had an entrance from the river by means of a flight of stairs leading from the long projecting starling, or foot of the pier. The upper part of the building was still more beautiful, having a continuous range of lancet-headed windows, looking out upon the river, and stairs outside connected with those below, for descent to the water.

The chapel ceased to be used for Divine service about—or soon after—the time of the Reformation, and then it fell into the service of trade, and became sadly maimed and mutilated. Divisions were run down the length of the chapels, so as to form numerous rooms; and though, in respect of the original character of the building, the desecration was great, in a domestic point of view, the result was very picturesque and effective.

Nothing more quaint could be imagined than the coming into so many small rooms, each with such beautiful and costly windows. The parlour behind the shop, for instance, had quite a range of triple windows. Another room had on one side the semi-

circular display of a beautiful chantry. A third had a niche with a fine piece of sculpture, showing, according to George Osborne's version, St. Thomas from the clouds, and with a nimbus, reproving King Henry for his very wicked conduct, while the monks flagellated him, that he might the better remember his promise to amend. A fourth had, in a long oblong recess, with semicircular top, the recumbent figure of some great personage, probably the architect of the bridge, Peter of Colechurch, who is known to have been interred in the chapel. And, lastly, there was an upper room that looked on the Thames, with windows of coloured glass, that were perfectly gorgeous with rubies, cerulean blues, bright oranges, and intensest greens—the glorious dyes belonging to an old English art, which has been since almost lost, but is now again reviving.

The General thought he should never tire of exploring the beauties of this place, so oddly mixed up with all the miscellaneous and extremely abundant stores of a rich mercer's stock. But it was evident that care was taken not to injure unnecessarily what remained of the beautiful chapel of St. Thomas; the Mercer was too proud of it for that. Antiquarians used to come to see it: and nothing delighted the Mercer more than to go through the place with such men, and dwell with loving interest on all that was

known of its history ; while lamenting its approaching downfall, for the chapel was doomed ! Not on its own account ; for though it was probably the very oldest part of the existing bridge, which had been renewed over and over again, it was still in excellent preservation. No, it was doomed because the bridge itself was doomed. This fine old structure, after long centuries of use, was giving way in every part at last. The houses leaned against each other sadly out of the perpendicular ; and accidents were continually occurring, showing on how precarious a tenure men then held their houses and their lives on poor old London Bridge. Sir Richard, however, little knew how much vitality there still was in the old structure, and that it had yet some four generations of men to outlive.

It was a great privation to the Mercer to be obliged, from motives of prudence, to leave all this to be shown to the General by George, who was not much of an antiquarian, but who had managed to pick up the more noticeable facts, and who had the good sense to see the General's eager interest in the place, and, in response, do his best.

It may be noted, in passing, that this walk through the place—which made it familiar to General Langton—was also valuable to him as affording readier means of escape in case of need.

When all else had been viewed, George demanded

if Mr. Daniel Sterne would not like to see their stew or fish-pond ?

“Stew—fish-pond ?” queried the supposed Daniel Sterne.

“Yes ; catch the monks, or anybody belonging to them, having a place without means to get the best of everything ! Come with me, and I’ll show you where they used to catch their fine salmon and eels, and whatever else struck their delicate fancies.”

Down they went, by long winding stairs, till, at last, they found themselves in a dark, vaulted chamber. Opening a door on the immensely long sterling, George said—


“There’s our stew ; that large, square opening you see in the starling. I amuse myself often by fishing here in the Thames ; and when I catch anything, I extricate the hook as neatly as I can, and use the fish to stock my stew. Some of them live, so I can find you a delicate morsel whenever you like to ask me. I can’t promise you salmon, for although one is caught now and then, they have, for the most part, gone long ago, poisoned out by the abominable nuisances that people throw into the river.”

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### AT THE PLAY.

CHRISTINA'S troubles were not of a kind to prevent her from enjoying herself at the play.

She was but sixteen, and, as yet, the theatre had lost none of its wondrous enchantment. There, where the gallant gentlemen bent over lovely ladies in the boxes—where the changing lights and snatches of sweet music took the heart by surprise—where, even before the enchanted curtain rose, the hand of art was at work tuning the soul that it might play upon it with the more power—there, where the heated air made slow sad pulses beat fast, and dim eyes grow bright, and where worn-out hearts were awakened, though on the morrow they would declare they had dreamed—there, in that palace of romance and love, where, to her pure eyes, all things were pure, Christina was happy in her love for George—happy, deliciously happy, in its very unfortunateness; since it seemed to bring her near to the heroines she worshipped. To-night when she was to see Betterton for the first time, she thrilled at



every movement of the great stage-curtain, and fixed upon it eager, wistful eyes ; while Sir Richard vainly tried to draw her attention to the friends and patrons he recognised amongst the fashionable and distinguished personages with which the theatre was crowded.

He had, however, a more attentive listener in the gentleman who had accompanied himself and Christina to the play that night, and who sat behind the young lady's chair, concealed by the curtain.

If, by any sudden impulse, he leaned an inch or two forwards, Sir Richard would lift his hand nervously, then check himself, and look at his friend with a smile, and press him to take a more prominent seat, but would give a sigh of intense relief when the friend refused.

At the very instant when the curtain which Christina watched with so much awe was rising, and when she began to feel in her very flesh the "nipping and eager air" on the battlements of Elsinore, there was a murmur through the house. Every head turned away from the stage. Sir Richard looked round, turned pale, and whispered to his friend—

"It is the king!"

Christina looked up at the royal boxes, which, indeed, were fast filling with most gaily-dressed company.

In the box next to that where the king sat were three persons. The first of these was a tall, thin man, with a red scarred forehead and haughty, restless eyes, whose glances, quick, bright, and suspicious, seemed to Sir Richard's friend to penetrate to every corner of the theatre.


Next to this gentleman, and in the centre of the box, was a young lady with large, square brows, a complexion like cream, and blue eyes that looked towards the stage with a weary and abstracted gaze. Her black velvet dress made the soft whiteness of her face more striking, and the strange mode of head-dress—the hair powdered and arranged in a high, stiff pile above the head—became her better than the same fashion became any lady in the theatre.

The third occupant of the box was a young man foppishly dressed, with a handsome but rather gloomy face, and bearing a resemblance both to the lady and the older man.

Seeing that these three persons attracted little less attention than the royal party, General Langton inquired of Christina who they were.

Christina did not hear his question, as she had that instant caught the lady's eye, and received from her and the younger gentleman a gracious bow and smile.

"You know that lady?" said General Langton.





"She has been very kind to me, my lord," Christina answered, turning timidly to look in the face which she found herself liking more and more.

"Mr. Sterne," he whispered gravely.

"Oh yes, my forgetfulness is unpardonable. Do you think her fair?" she asked him.

He looked across carelessly, before answering.

"Yes, passably—nay, *very* fair."

Christina watched him and smiled.

"All the town thinks so," said she.

"And rightly," replied Langton, with warmth. Then he whispered, "Were *your* king *my* king, I should pay the beauteous and majestic lady yonder the best compliment man could pay, by asking her to be my second queen; and laugh at the horrified faces of the devotees to royal etiquette. But, as it is, that would be but a doubtful compliment, I fear, to such loveliness."

"Hush!" said Christina, laying her finger on her lips with a pretty air of fright. "No treason, Mr. Sterne. I am a faithful subject of King William, and I maintain he has as much grace as a Stuart; but that, unlike a Stuart, he does not carry it *all* in his person and manners."

"The king is dead. Long live the king!" said Langton, with a melancholy smile. "Your father has not let you lag behind the times, Mistress Christina. But you have not told me who the pale

beauty is. Is she of any family whose name I may, perchance, remember?"

"The name, my lord," said Christina, in a low voice, "is not one dear to Jacobites' ears."

"What!" said Langton, "is that sombre-looking gentleman—with whose face, by-the-by, it seems to me I must have had some early acquaintance—is he one of the many traitors to our dear and hapless——"

Christina raised her fan warningly, then whispered hurriedly and with averted eyes, for Betterton was on the stage—

"Judge for yourself; it is the Earl of Bridgeminster."

Absorbed by the expression of the actor's face, that stopped even the murmur of applause which greeted its first look, Christina saw nothing of the emotion the name she uttered brought into the face of her listener.

He did not look at the opposite box immediately, but continued gazing at Christina's face with eyes half wistful, half doubting:

"Your pardon," said he, gently, "but, my dear madam, did I hear the name aright—Bridgeminster?"

Christina smiled, and nodded absently.

"And the lady?"

"She is his daughter,—Lady Bridgeminster, or as

we have been used to call her, before the death of her elder sister, the Lady Hermia."

"Thank you. That lady is, you say, Lady——"

"Hermia."

"Hermia!" he reiterated, "daughter of the Earl of Bridgeminster?"

"Yes."

"Thanks, thanks! Pardon me for taking your attention so long."

While Christina's dilated eyes turned once more to the great actor's face, and became blind to all else, the quiet form beside her seemed to shrink and draw back, as if smitten by some sudden and powerful emotion.

Unseen by any of the eyes which Betterton held spell-bound, his hand drew back a corner of the curtain of Sir Richard's box; and, with his elbow on Christina's chair, and his brow leant forwards on his hand, Robert Langton looked across the crowded heads and rapt faces, his own face pale and his eyes misty with the emotion that made him almost afraid to remain where he was.

While he looked, the lights in the theatre were lowered, and the face of Hermia, in its pale, pathetic beauty, seemed to gleam in the dim light like a lily in a twilight garden.

He saw nothing of the two men beside her, he saw nothing of Betterton, except as one sees a shadow in

a dream; all that evening he saw nothing—save with an unconscious eye—nothing but that face which had wooed him in the cathedral to cross the perilous sea, and thus led to his still more perilous mission.

Christina did not notice his silence—noticed nothing, in fact, but Betterton—till Sir Richard, at the beginning of the last act, whispered—

“Teena, there’s that young rascal Osborne. Look at the fellow’s wig! Look at his scarlet cloth suit lined and faced with blue; and laced with broad gold lace at heaven knows how much a yard! Is that a figure for an honest ’prentice to cut? Times have changed, by Jove! but I know the day when his bones would have ached for it!”

Christina’s face flushed suddenly—not through shame for George, nor indignation at Sir Richard’s anger, but because a glow of great delight came over her heart to think that George Osborne was there. He would see her, was looking at her now in all her splendour of white and green and diamonds, in which General Langton had compared her—and very prettily, she thought—to a daisy in grass, bright with the morning dew. And Sir Richard had said, “‘Gad, my lord,’ tis a sort of dew the Jacobites would soon dry up in poor England were they not sharply looked to.”

Yes, George was there; and as to his fine dress,

could she not forgive him when perhaps it was put on for her sake, and that he might not look mean in her eyes? Besides, he was so handsome, so gallant! Such a dress seemed to belong to him by good rights, and of course he could not know how dearly she loved him in his 'prentice clothes. If his extravagance pained her, it was because it grieved her father, and must needs bring trouble upon George himself.

She hoped he was not suffering now, but was as happy as herself, for Christina was supremely happy. She saw no fortunate ending to her love for George—she desired to see none; for Betterton's art and Betterton's face, in spite of his defects, had made her in love with tragedy; and no earthly lot seemed so exquisite as the prospect of being persecuted for George's sake, of dying for him, or better still, of their both being persecuted and dying together.

Glancing once away from the stage to George, with delicious tears in her eyes, she saw he had moved from his place. Her eyes seemed to know by instinct where to find him, for she saw him immediately in a box below which he had been standing.

She sees him, and her sweet, soft eyes grow large, and her face pale, and as tragic as *Hamlet's* as he looks on his dying mother; whose cry of—

No, no, the drink, the drink!

Christina does not hear. Her own insignificant little life, at this moment, is to her a great and terrible tragedy; for there stands George, behind a gay and laughing little lady, who is looking mockingly at him, over her fan, as he bends with a grace and passion Christina has never seen in him before, and touches with his lips the long curl the lady wears on her neck in the style since immortalized in Pope's *Belinda*.

The lights dance before Christina's eyes; her hands grow damp, her heart cold, oppressed, stifling.

Can this be George—her George? the "'prentice lad of low degree" to whom she—a young lady, a rich knight's daughter—has given her love?

Yes, truly, it is George; for now he looks up, and steals a half-frightened glance at Sir Richard, who has risen to his feet in his rage at the sight of him.

Christina does not know Sir Richard has seen George and his companion, and, even in her misery, would fain not betray George by a look or word; so she turns towards the stage, and meets the dying face of *Hamlet*, which, wrought upon as she already is, proves too much for the child's overstrained heart, and provokes the cry she has tried so bravely to suppress.

She knows people have heard her, and that friends are hurrying to the box, as she lies on Sir Richard's breast; and Sir Richard, who knows all that has

passed, looks at her with fond eyes, as she tries to smile on the faces crowding round her, and to murmur, through her blanched lips—

“The play—it was the play and Mr. Betterton; but I am better.”

“Yes, yes; it was Betterton,” said Sir Richard—  
“Betterton! Confound him!” But that last imprecation had nothing to do with the great actor.

The little knot dispersed, and Christina was taken home; and it was talked of even to Betterton himself how he had sent Sir Richard Constable’s pretty daughter into fits.

George Osborne heard of it in the presence of his fair enchantress, and thought to himself for an instant what a kind and tender heart his master’s child possessed. But his thoughts went no farther than that. He never dreamt of her illness having been caused by any secret grief—still less that he himself had aught to do with it.

It is true, he found her eyes looking on him kindly when he first glanced up at her, thinking to himself, with a little ‘prentice sort of pride in his master’s daughter, that she outshone all other ladies there; and for a moment a feeling of shame and contrition smote him, to think how little of late the welfare of his master’s business had been in his mind.

To do George justice, however, he was innocent

of the presumption of which Sir Richard in his own mind accused him, that he was secretly trying to win Christina's love. Her evident interest in him he took as part of the goodness and sweetness of her nature; which, at one time or another, nearly all Sir Richard's workpeople had experienced.

That very night, as she sat there in her glistening silk, and with the diamonds quivering on her white neck and arms, and all her heart's love in her face, she had seemed to George as radiantly beautiful and as far above him as the stars of the sky; and he had cast down his eyes because he felt himself unworthy, even as her father's servant, to look upon her.

And then he turned again with new zest to the enchantress by his side, about whom he knew so little, and for whom he felt so much.

It was not often that George was spoken to with respect by the fine ladies who frequented his master's shop; and when, one morning, a lovely creature came to him with outstretched hand and beaming face—then, starting back, blushing and apologised and declared she had taken him for my Lord So-and-so, whom she had known in Italy—it was not likely that George would forget it. He had been little in danger of doing so even before the flattering incident was brought freshly to his mind by the charming smile he received from the same lady when she



came again to the shop—and when she asked, “Was he not fond of Betterton? She was, and went to see him *so* often.”

From that hour George’s peace of mind was gone. He thought of nothing but her from morning till evening, and all night dreamt of nothing else. He went to the play evening after evening and saw her with her friends, who all seemed to him gay, prosperous, aristocratic people, judging by their rich dresses, loud, confident manner, and supreme indifference to all but themselves. She smiled and bowed to him but never spoke; till, one night, George saw her going out to her carriage alone, and flew before her to open the door; and a few confused words and looks were exchanged between them, which George would have hardly dared to remember as being other than a dream, if he had not carried home with him a tiny perfumed glove, which, in her confusion, she had dropped on giving him her hand.

On this night of the Mercer’s visit to the theatre George came as usual, looking for his mysterious beauty. Would she be there, he wondered? Would she again be left alone so that he might speak to her?

He had scarce felt the floor under his feet when he had seen her, late in the evening, enter her box, glance rapidly round the theatre, look for a moment or two fixedly and inquisitively at some distant box,

then turn away, see him, and, with a joyous, child-like movement, beckon him with her fan.

George thought the very door-opener must hear his heart beat as he entered her box and saw she was then alone.

She started, half-extended her hand, then drew it back, saying, with downcast eyes and a charming confusion,—

“You—you have come? I did not mean—I had forgot you might not—not remember me.”

“Oh! madam,” stammered George, “that is impossible.”

“How? Impossible for me to have been remembered?” said she, with a touch of merriment in her confusion.

“Alas! madam,” George said, with a despairing effort. “I mean—— You know what I mean!”

“Certainly; that my face is so insignificant, it were impossible to remember it.”

“Madam,” said George, gaining courage by her raillery, “it is too cruel to take away a man’s senses, and then laugh at him for the want of them! What I would have said had I been less—less moved by the delight of finding myself in your presence, is this—that it were impossible for me to forget you while memory remains to me—and this!”

And he dared to show her the little glove he carried in his breast.

"How do I know 'tis mine?" asked she, turning away from it and from George's eyes, that were full of gratified vanity and pleasure.

George smiled, and bending over her shoulder, breathed tremulously and reverentially the word—

"Maria!"

Her eyes answered instantly to the name, and then George's eyes and hers smiled into each other with apparently a world of meaning; while, in reality, all they meant was that the name was in the glove.

"Who is that behind the curtain in Sir Richard's box?" asked Maria, suddenly.

"Sir Richard's box!" exclaimed the startled apprentice, then first becoming aware of his master's presence in the theatre. He drew the curtain that in part concealed him a little farther across towards Maria's side with an effort at composure; and then, remembering her question, he said, glancing through a narrow opening he had left for observation,—

"I see no one—but Sir Richard and Miss Constable, his daughter."

"Watch, and you will before long. There's some one there like you—too modest to expose himself unnecessarily," and Maria laughed; and, as George thought, somewhat maliciously. Seeing he was annoyed, she went back to the incident of the glove,

as if nothing had happened to interrupt the talk on that subject,—

“And so I am to believe, just because you show me this, that you have kept it ever since I lost it? Confess that you laid your hand on it to-night by chance.”

“Madam, on the word of——” George would have liked dearly to say “a gentleman,” but the arch violet eyes reminded him, by the most faint gleam of satire, of where he had first seen them; so he said boldly, and with heightened colour, while his voice was very tender and humble—

“On the word of an honest ’prentice this little glove has lain——”

“There! look now!” whispered Maria; avoiding, however, to make any movement, or show any interest by the play of her features that might be noticed.

George did look, and saw some one speaking to the Mercer, across Christina, and who had therefore been obliged for the moment to leave the privacy of the curtain.

“Oh,” said he, “that is Mr. Sterne!”

“Sterne!” echoed Maria, forgetting all about George and the glove.

“Yes, Mr. Daniel Sterne, dealer in thrown silk; he’s brought us a valuable lot for our new mill in the country.”

"Oh, then you know him—well, I suppose?" said Maria, as if the matter were growing indifferent.

"I do not, but my master does, or did in old times."

"Old times! Where does he come from now?"

"Paris, I believe!" said George, coldly, and hardly able to conceal his personal mortification.

"Lodging with you?"

"Yes We share the same bedroom."

"Ah—then I was mistaken. Forgive me—but I really thought for the moment I had seen that gentleman somewhere before, and that made me interrupt you. I really [am quite ashamed. You do not know what an impulsive creature I am. How heedlessly I follow the bent of the moment. Not one worth caring for, you think? Yes, yes, I see it in your eyes!"

George did not know what she saw in his eyes, but he was transported by what he saw in hers, and forgot in an instant Mr. Sterne, and the annoyance caused by him.

"You were about to say—on the word of an honest gentleman—no, 'prentice,"—said Maria, with another of her fascinating glances, "that——"

"That your glove, madam, has lain on my heart since the moment I saved it from the mire of the streets. But, madam, in mercy doubt my word,

if believing it will make you angry—as I fear it will.”

“As I fear it should,” said Maria.

“But does not?” pleaded George, with his trembling hand on her chair.

Maria raised her eyes to his with a hesitating, wistful look.

“Do you know,” said she, “I feel that I should, by right, be angry, if I wish for your—your respect?”

“In that case,” answered George, softly, and in a voice trembling with ecstasy, “your anger would be too much kindness for me, and so, perhaps, embolden me to incur it again; so be not angry at all with me. I have suffered enough for my presumption, for I know——”

Maria looked up with a tender, child-like curiosity.

“What do you know, George?” she asked.

The sound of his own name coming from her lips in music struck him dumb. He turned pale, his eyes became suffused with delicious moisture, and his head grew giddy; and then it was his lips touched the curl, and Christina’s tragedy began:—George, in the excitement of the moment, having unconsciously bent his head so far forward in the direction of Maria as to become visible to those in the Mercer’s box.

Within a minute or two after the Mercer and

Daniel Sterne had left their box with the scarcely yet recovered girl, Maria said suddenly—

“You must leave me. I see some friends of mine have observed me, and are rising to come here.”

“Heavens! what a degradation should they find you in such company!” said George, flushing, and taking his hand from her chair.

She rose, took his hand, and, going away from the front of the box, looked at him steadily; and it seemed to George as if the simple childish beauty had changed suddenly into a woman with eyes full of a sad wisdom, disappointment, weariness. “George,” said she, almost mournfully, “it is you who are too good for friends of mine. Go, go! And, now, listen to me, and don’t call me cruel, for I intend doing you a great kindness, in spite of myself. I tell you to see me no more; keep from me, shun me as you would a pestilence. I shall bring misery on you. Fool, fool! away from me!”

She hid her face in her hands, which George caught in his own, and kissed, murmuring—

“Oh, madam, to see you again, once again, alone like this, were a joy I would purchase, if need be, with a long life of misery. Say you will see me once more, and trouble not about the price I must pay for such happiness!”

“You see, George,” said Maria, smiling her old

bright smile, and speaking very rapidly, as if anxious for his departure, "you won't take a kindness at my hands. Well, what can I do? People will not let me do right when I try. So you really wish us to meet again?"

"As if it were possible for me to exist without our meeting again!" said George.

"Well, well, have you ever been to Spring Gardens?"

"Never," answered George.

"Never! Oh, 'tis the most charming place! Will you take me there to-morrow?"

There could be but one answer to such a question. That answer was given in a kiss, and they parted: George's brain bubbling with joyous emotion, his whole nature in a state of delicious intoxication. He trod on air as he swept through the streets. He broke out now and then into a low laugh, which died faintly off into a sweet smile. He felt a wondrous benevolence towards all created beings; even towards that unlucky Mr. Daniel Sterne.

And as to Maria? The instant he had gone fairly out of sight, she waited for no companions, but covering her conspicuous dress with a wrapper she had brought with her, and her lovely head in a hood, as if simply to protect her face from the frosty air in leaving the warm theatre, she hurried along the passages with the utmost practicable speed till



she reached a spot in the vestibule—where she knew she must meet the Mercer and his party pass—if only they had not already passed.

She just caught them. She saw the burly Sir Richard—on one side of a pale, half-fainting, and beautiful girl, and the stranger, Mr. Daniel Sterne, on the other—both tenderly supporting and cheering her.

“The fresh air will soon revive you,” Mr. Sterne was saying, while Maria intently listened to his accent and his every word, and almost thrust her face into his, as he passed, in her anxiety to study his countenance.

She followed them out, saw them enter the carriage that waited for them, and waited till the carriage itself disappeared, before she could go on her own way, murmuring to herself—

“Like—very like in height, manner, voice, but——” The sentence remained unfinished, as if the doubt suggested, and thought over, completely puzzled and absorbed her.


## CHAPTER XIX.

### CIRCE AND HER SPELLS.

GEORGE'S exhilaration of spirit did not last long. As he lay in bed that night, revelling in recollections of Maria's beauty, tenderness, and grace of person, and of her peculiar and inconsistent but always attractive mental charms; there began to come by degrees into his ravishing pictures of her, incongruous, not to say discordant images and side-light shadows that affected them even to distortion.

He began to doubt her truthfulness and honesty, and then was savage with himself for doubting. One thing after another came into his mind in connection with the meeting at the theatre that jarred upon him, even while he thought he could explain the whole satisfactorily. Probably this state would have died away, and been forgotten in a few hours, but for a new incident that deepened his worst fears.

Rising early, as it was his duty to do, he happened to look out of the window, and his eye fell on a small boat rowed by a single waterman, who had



for his fare two persons—a woman, who wore a veil, and a middle-aged man. It was just before the turn of the tide, when the river was at its quietest, and when it was easy to hang about the starlings of the bridge, which were generally so dangerous to pass through.

Something, he hardly knew what, suggested to George the girl was Maria, and that the pair were watching him, which was unlikely, or watching his companion. In an instant Maria's inquisitiveness about Mr. Daniel Sterne occurred to him, with great sense of alarm, not only for what it might portend as regards her, but for its possible effect on the stranger who lay there so peaceably sleeping. And this had been his doing! Who was Daniel Sterne?—Possibly a Jacobite in danger, and seeking concealment.

He was horrified at his own imprudence, and the first effect was a determination not to keep his appointment, or, indeed, seek her again at all. And for some time he kept firmly to his purpose. But when a miserable week had elapsed, one afternoon, as the shop was full and George at his busiest, acting as a kind of confidential clerk, he heard a voice outside the shop that sent the blood to his face, and caused him to let a roll of delicate silk fall to the floor, that he had been examining to test its quality.

He looked through the window, and beheld, to his astonishment, Maria on horseback, waiting for her groom to assist her to alight. Her dress was truly remarkable, imitating as nearly as she could that of a man. The coat and waistcoat of blue camlet, trimmed and embroidered with silver, were cut in manly style; though with a certain delicacy and refinement in fitting the charming shape that quite transcended the possibilities of the other sex. She did not, therefore, positively need the long petticoat to explain she was only playing at the masculine; but she had it; and, having it, decorum was satisfied, and left full scope to her fancy in carrying out the rest of her garb in accord with the original design. Her beaver hat was smartly cocked, silver-edged, and bore a feather; while her hair, curled and powdered, hung low below her shoulders, and was tied—as was not unusual with the fast young gentleman of the day—with a red ribbon, which streamed in the wind behind her, as she leapt lightly down, drew her petticoat around her, and entered the shop.

Sir Richard was in the room behind the shop, laughing and chatting with a bevy of rouged and powdered dowagers; who found the Mercer's sanctum a convenient place for collecting and circulating the latest fashionable scandal of the day, while looking over the choice wares especially reserved for them to

see. The younger ladies preferred being waited on by the 'prentices, some of whom they favoured with a sort of haughty insolent flirtation.

While George, turning away, picked up the silk and began refolding it with moist, trembling hands, he heard behind him the peculiar wooden-sounding pat-pat of a lady's fashionable boot, with its enormously high heel, then, lifting his eyes, looked straight into Maria's. She returned his look with one which was at the same time inquisitive and reproachful.

George glanced fearfully at Sir Richard, and did not dare move to wait upon her; Maria did so too; and, seeing that the Mercer's eyes were on them, she threw herself in a chair near to George, and, taking hold of the silk, said to him, in a clear voice that rang through the shop so as to be heard by all in it—

“Come, come, sir! if 'tis too much trouble to wait upon me, and to unfold, pray send me some one else less nice. You see this end is frayed, and I shall not buy if I see not the whole length.”

Sir Richard heard this speech with a contemptuous smile, and still watched them as he talked to the chattering dowagers. George felt he was watching them, and felt sure he recognised Maria as his companion at the play, though she, not knowing Sir Richard had seen her, felt safe.

"Oh, madam," murmured George, clumsily unfolding the silk, "why came you here? I did not deserve—I never thought—'tis too kind, but 'tis a kindness that may ruin me."

"There, sir, do you see that? I now perceive why you wished me to buy with my eyes shut," said Maria aloud. Then, as she pretended to be showing him a fray, her fingers touched George's under the silk. The two clasped hands, and George, forgetting his master's eye, and everything in the world save that kind little hand and those tearful blue eyes he looked into, muttered—

"Maria, can it be that you forgive me?"

"And what, George, if I do forgive you?" she asked, with a deep sigh.

"Madam, I deserve it not—I desire it not. It was folly and presumption, my daring to think myself worthy of your kindness. No, do not forgive me. Scorn me—I deserve your scorn. Let me see you no more—I deserve to see you no more."

"George," said Maria, lifting her eyebrows with a look of childish misery and protestation, "what have *I* done that I should be made to——"

"George!" shouted Sir Richard.

And George had no resource but to bid good-bye to his enchantress and go to the Mercer, who, the instant he entered the room, shut the door, and angrily addressed him:—

"Who was that lady?"

"I cannot tell you, Sir Richard," was the respectful but unhesitating answer.

"You cannot tell me either her name, rank, or residence?"

"No, Sir Richard."

"Strange! We must ourselves see to these matters, I suppose, when she comes again."

"I trust not, Sir Richard. It is not my intention to see her again."

"Was it by any kind of appointment she came now?"

"No, Sir Richard; and I was greatly distressed when I saw her come in."

"Hem! Distress was not exactly the word I should have chosen to express your attitude and looks."

George was silent.

"Pray, is this the lady you were with on the night of the play?"

"It is, Sir Richard."

"Then permit me, Master Osborne, to express my belief that you are not dealing honestly with me. I do not believe that you can possibly be ignorant of this lady's name. You must know, sir, more than you choose to tell."

"Pardon me, Sir Richard; I did not say I did not know."

"Ha! What's that?"

"I said I could not possibly tell you."

"And why?" demanded the angry master.

"Because, as a gentleman——" George paused, coloured violently all over, then became deathly pale, and felt he would have given worlds to be able to recall the foolish phrase.

"Because, as a gentleman——?" maliciously repeated the Mercer.

"Because, Sir Richard, as a man having the feelings of a man towards a woman, I could not possibly expose her to any pain or trouble that her brief connection with me might involve. If I am not now sufficiently punished, I am ready to bear whatever you please to inflict; but I ask you, Sir Richard, to let me alone bear it, and I promise you I will then see her no more."

"That won't do. She, it appears, follows you. I shall deal with this matter myself. Be wise. Tell me all you know, and I will guard all your reasonable susceptibilities to an extent greater than you deserve. Now, then, her name?"

"I decline to give it."

"George," said the Mercer, growing for the first time really angry with him, "I warn you in good time. I have the power to exact obedience."

"Not in this matter, Sir Richard."

"In any matter, sir, as I will take care to let you



see. You are my apprentice, bound to obey all my reasonable orders."

George was silent, but his attitude showed the stubbornness of his determination. The Mercer, seeing this, grew more and more irritable, and went about, while talking, as if engaged in half a dozen occupations — banging closet doors, pulling out drawers, and so on. Suddenly he paused opposite to George.

"Do you know that I can send you before the Mercers' Court of Assistants?"

"What for?"

"To have you severely flogged for disobedience."

"Oh, no, Sir Richard!" said George, with a smile that perfectly infuriated his master.

"Can't I, though? You forget. One older than you was flogged to within an inch of his life not five years ago!"

"I am sure they won't flog me!" said George Osborne.

"Why are you sure?"

"Because, before they flogged me, I'd give them occasion at least for a more dignified punishment. I should murder the man who touched me!"

The Mercer looked at George's faithful but most stern-looking face, and he saw there something that frightened him; and then, by a revulsion of feeling, he began to feel ashamed of his threats, and to per-

ceive their uselessness. George Osborne was certainly not of the stuff that could be dealt with by flogging, even though he was so young.

"Can't you understand," said the Mercer, in a quieter tone, "that it is for your own good I speak?"

"I do believe that, with all my heart and soul!"

"And yet you refuse to be helped?"

"I must refuse."

"And will fall, in consequence, most likely. I wash my hands of you! I will be no more responsible! And this is your gratitude, is it? I have long ceased to treat you as an apprentice. I have been bringing you forward in all possible ways—but there's an end to clerkships and confidences. I will not be reminded, every hour in the day, of my foolish confidence in one who has not the sense to understand his own interests!" Go back to your former labours at the counter!

"Do you really mean me to do that, Sir Richard?" asked George, a little wistfully.

"Yes!" said the Mercer, though the moment he had said it he regretted the word.

"Then I beg very earnestly, Sir Richard, that instead of humiliating me thus, and for such a reason—I beg that you will cancel my indentures, and let me go?"

"Whither?"

"I don't know, and I don't care!" said George, his firmness beginning to give way a little.

"Pooh! pooh! It's not to be thought of! Your friends would have a right to challenge my behaviour, I think, if I were to do anything so weak. Proceed with those accounts; think over what has passed. I shall hope you will yet give me a better answer. Stop! I will not receive one other word now. You can't want to ruin yourself; but if you do, you may as well think over how to do it magnificently. Do everything well, boy; even if it's to destroy yourself!

"George! George! Do for heaven's sake cease all this folly! What do you think my daughter will say to hear of such mad doings?"

## CHAPTER XX.

### GEORGE'S DISCOVERY.

TOWARDS evening, when George was superintending the closing of the shop, a shrill voice said behind him from the street—

“Mr. George Osborne;” and when George turned, a little black boy, dressed as a page, gave a letter into his hand; then, setting his back against the wall, folded his arms and grinned, saying—

“Pompey wait answer.”

“Go a little further, then,” said George, looking round in dismay, and hiding the delicate little note in his cuff.

The shop was too full of curious eyes for him to read it there, so he ran down to the packing-room, tore his note open, and read it by the light of a hanging oil-lamp.

Kensington, Wednesday.

GEORGE—I should not write or breathe this name after what has passed, but that, since the morning, a new thought has troubled me. Your words implied self-reproach—suffering. Was it through me? Oh, how can I forgive myself, if it is so; and how patient my dear friend was when I offered *him* forgiveness! I indeed

brought you woe with my friendship? Then put it from you. Think no more of it, but let me have one consolation. Let me know you have forgiven me. Come and tell me so. Let me hear from your own lips you do not and will not always hate your poor

MARIA.

George tore off the blank sheet, and, kneeling down by a bale, wrote with the packer's pen and ink—

SWEET MADAM DEAREST AND KINDEST,—Your poor servant comes to-night to thank you for your wondrous goodness to him, and to bid you farewell for ever.

GEORGE.

He folded it and went out, and busied himself with the window-bars and bolts till he could, unseen, thrust it into Pompey's hand, together with his last sixpence.

George kept this appointment faithfully.

Pompey opened the door, and, showing his teeth in a broad grin, bade him wait in the lobby whilst he informed his mistress of his arrival.

Presently George heard the creak of a boot on the stairs, and, turning his head, saw a grey-headed gentleman, whose face and form he instantly remembered to have seen, both at his master's shop and at his own magnificent mansion. It was the Earl of Bridgeminster. George hung his head, and drew close to the wall. Would the earl recognise him? No, scarcely, in such a place.

Nearly at the bottom of the staircase the footsteps

paused. George's breath seemed to stop at the same time. He glanced fearfully towards the stairs. The earl was standing still and looking at him, with his small, frowning eyes, from head to foot.

George's heart beat at a fearful rate at that moment, for he knew as well that he was recognised as if the earl had called him by name. The earl, however, did not speak, but turned abruptly, and went upstairs again.

What had he gone to do? Tell Maria he had seen him—to ask her why he came? Then was George's heart filled with trouble for her—the embarrassment, the disgrace she must feel at his being discovered there by the earl, who was probably her friend, perhaps her guardian. What could George do? The only thing that occurred to him, in his agitation, was to save her from having to answer the earl's questions about him—to go up while the earl was there, and pretend he had come about some purchase she had made at the shop that morning.

So George leaped up three stairs at a time, feeling bold in his generous anxiety for Maria, and prepared to act the rude, unmannerly 'prentice, and burst into the room with his message.

A door stood open, and ere he had found courage to make any noise, he saw a room divided by a large folding screen. While he hesitated an instant he

heard Maria speaking in tones and words that seemed to fall like ice-sleet on his heart.

"Leave him to me, my lord!" said that sweet voice in a cold, business-like tone. "You are right, it would be most hazardous in you to question him. What I told you about Sir Richard I drew from him with some difficulty."

"I know! I know;" answered the earl; "'tis an arduous task you undertake, but a noble one. Perhaps, madam, another twenty pounds——"

"Nay, my lord," interrupted Maria, a little wearily, "I was saying that this George Osborne, though a simple fellow, is too faithful to his master to let us know another word concerning his affairs should he once discover our purpose."

"What! not for money?" said the earl. "Then is he a rare 'prentice indeed!"

"Nay, not even for money would he betray his master!"

"For love, then, charming Mistress Maria?"

Maria laughed, a clear ringing laugh that made George's cheeks burn, then said—

"No, not knowingly for love, my lord!"

"For love unknowingly then, 'tis all the same. You are a clever woman, madam; I do not wonder that His Majesty at St. Germain's prizes his fair spy——"

"I trust His Majesty in England does not prize

her less, my lord," said Maria, a little sarcastically.

"Well, madam, if I mistake not, that pretty bauble on your neck scarcely came from your friends at Paris."

"Would it be treason to say that they are only less generous than my friends in England, because less wealthy? Besides, they honour me in a way you do not—they trust me. Yes, you smile, my lord, but positively they trust me."

"And we——"

"And you, my lord, knowing how I use that trust, are wiser; for I doubt if King James himself has been more closely watched by Maria Modena Preston than Maria Modena Preston by her generous friends in England. Farewell, my lord! and trust me to get all that is to be got out of Sir Richard's truant 'prentice."

George, without hearing the opening or shutting of any door behind the screen, knew in an instant that the earl was gone.

"Now, Pompey," cried Maria, in a fresh, joyous voice.

She ran to a glass, and George who had come from behind the screen, saw her putting two pink moss roses in her powdered hair, obtained from some florist at a pretty price, and smiling to herself. Then she swept away, looking



over her shoulder into the glass, and singing deliciously.

In this manner she came close to George, who moved on one side and bowed low. Maria, seeing him, started, blushed, and shrank back in girlish confusion. Then she recovered herself, and advanced with extended hand and eyes full of bashful but frank pleasure.

George looked at her, and neither spoke nor moved. Maria looked surprised and hurt, then, glancing up tearfully, said, with pouting lips—

“What, are you going to be angry with me for a little vanity? Was it a great sin in your eyes that I looked in the glass when you were coming? Was it a great sin to be anxious to look well? And then, when my glass, which I begin to fancy must have told me untruths—when my glass, I say, showed me at my poor best, was it sinful to laugh and sing for pleasure?”

“Nay, madam,” said George, “rather ask yourself,—Is it worth being at such pains and anxiety to subdue so simple a fellow?”

Maria started back and stared at him.

“Even for another twenty pounds,” said he, looking at her with a pale face, and eyes that gleamed almost cruelly.

Maria ran to him, raising her arms and crying—

“Ah, is it so? Eavesdropping! eavesdropping! Then I am ruined indeed!”

“Ruined!” echoed George, throwing off the hand she had laid on his arm—“ruined, madam! What! because a ‘truant’prentice’ chances to overhear the little honour he has left being bargained for by you and your employer?”

“George, George, listen to me!” cried Maria, clinging to his arm.

“Ruined!” went on George, raising his other hand above her, as if he would strike her—“ruined, because your plotting has been overheard by a poor fool like me, from whom you undertake to get all that is to be got? Well, madam, triumph!—that you have already got from me the two things most precious, even to a simple fellow—a fool!”

Maria, rudely pushed off by his arm, stood and gazed at him with eyes full of fear and astonishment.

“I had honesty,” said George, “I had my master’s confidence. I saw you: and have endangered both. I see plainly enough now that, from the day I first beheld you, you *intended* me to lose both. What more is it you want of me? My master’s secrets? Let me tell you one, then, that may perchance concern you. Know that he hath a few stout people about him, sweet Mistress Preston, who would deal but roughly with spies found near his place, though

they be fair even as yourself, or rejoice in the pay of two royal masters."

"George Osborne! This to a woman!"

George closed his lips, white with passion, and, almost leaning against the wall by which he stood, looked at her as she turned half towards him, her hands clasped, her cheeks nearly as white as her pyramid of powdered hair, her brows raised with amazement and horror.

Even thus she was lovely; and, looking on her, George felt the sting of his own words run into his heart. She looked at him till her eyes filled with tears. He turned his face on his arm against the wall.

"Did mine ears deceive me, George? Was it *your* voice that spoke those savage words?"

"Did my ears deceive me, madam?" responded the apprentice, looking up at her—"was it not your voice, your own, from which I learnt what thing you are—a spy?—oh, fear not, I speak it low, a double spy!—that the beauty I thought a divine thing in your face is but a wrecker's light to lure men to their own destruction."

"George, George! I am not so wicked as you think."

"No? 'Twere no wickedness to try to ruin my master—my kind master—and through me—a worthless wretch, who deserves no better wage from

him than a halter! This were no wickedness, fair Mistress Preston—oh, none, none!”

“George, were it known to the noble gentleman you saw with me but now how little I have thought of your master since it has been supposed I was watching him, 'tis likely it would go hard with me for bread this next month or two.”

“What, then, you own to being what I have called you?” cried George. “I had half hoped—I had been mad enough to hope—you might convince me, in spite of all, that 'twas otherwise.”

“I know you too well, George, to try to convince you of what is not true.”

“Then you are——”

“I am what you have called me, in the cruelest words you could find,” answered Maria, drawing herself up with an air of childish queenliness, and looking at him fearlessly; “though I must tell you, that to myself I scarce appear as wicked as I must to you. I act not for myself, but for great and clever men, and to them I leave the responsibility of all I do—'tis their business, not mine. To me 'tis mere child's play. I am an orphan—I have no money—I must live; and see, these hands were scarce made to bake or brew. As it is, I enjoy life heartily while I earn my bread. I saw *you*, toiling and sad, and called you to come and be gay with me a little while; and you come and listen behind my

screen, and find me out, and—heavens! what an ado!” And she hid her face in her hands and sobbed.

“Maria, Maria!” said George, passionately, “I dare not believe you. You are too clever to be so simple.”

“Am I not simple?” replied Maria, looking at him with flashing eyes. “I will tell you something, George, and you shall tell me then if I am wise or simple. First—do you think me fair?”

And she dried her tears and looked at him without any apparent coquetry.

George’s glance, gloomy as it was, proved sufficient answer.

“Would you believe, even from my lips,” said Maria, glancing down at her little foot with coquettish shyness, “that both here in England, and abroad, gallant—sometimes noble gentlemen—have courted me?”

“God help them, madam!” groaned George.

“And all with fair promises, as I had been a duchess. And I—come, George, show me now my wisdom—I listened to them not—was deaf to all.

“Oh, George,” she added, sinking on her knees by the chair she held, and laughing hysterically—“oh, George, tell me now am I simple or wise: that love which a French courtier’s grace, a gallant soldier’s pleading, an Italian’s passion, an English coronet

could not win, hath been given, almost unsought—to whom? to what? oh, George, what wisdom or what simplicity—to a London 'prentice!"

She bowed her head on the chair, and clasped her hands over it.

George half advanced towards her—then stopped and gazed upon her with bitter distrust.

"Oh, madam," said he, half pityingly, "you need not fear me, nor invent fresh falsehoods to make me keep your counsel. I would not betray you to save my own life. Maria, I came to bid you farewell. 'Tis easier to do so than I thought it one hour ago; though even now——"

He turned abruptly, and went to the door.

Maria moved half round on her knees, and cried in a tone of sharp pain—

"Are you going?"

He laid his hand on the door-handle, and at the sound Maria started on her feet, flew to him, and clasped her hands on his arm.

"You will not leave me thus. Oh, not thus!"

George's pitying and loving heart whispered him, "Stay, stay." And it was to that, rather than to her, that he spoke in passionate resistance, when he shook the arm she clung to, and said—

"Off—off! Shall I stay to help you ruin my master? Tempt me no more—seek me no more. I will keep secret all I have heard to-night, I give

you my pledge. But, madam, if I find you prying into my master's matters, I promise you sharp punishment. What say you to Mistress Jane Shore's penance! Off, I say—off."

He flung her from him with such violence, that she tottered back and fell with a faint moan.

But for that moan, George would have fled. He clung to the door and listened. A dead silence, more touching and awful to him than any cry, followed.

He looked into the room with his hands to his brows. The girlish form lay quite still, the white cheek to the floor.

With a muttered imprecation on himself, he went and knelt beside it, and with a great throb, that seemed well-nigh to burst his heart, took the still form in his arms, and bore it to the sofa in the window, which he opened, and through which came the sharp wintry breeze laden with the odour from a pot of early hyacinths.

George held her supported against his fear-stricken, suffering heart while the breeze blew on her.

When the great blue eyes opened and stared at him, his own eyes filled and ran over and his arms quivered.

"What has happened?" asked the weak, frightened voice. "Who is this?"

"'Tis I, madam ; your wretched servant, George Osborne."

"George Osborne ! I thought he went but now ; I thought he left me with—with cruel words. Ah, yes, I fell. My arm ! my poor arm !"

"Alas, madam, he was savage, he was fiendish—mad—mad because of your confession, which he durst not believe."

"But he is kind now. How is that ? Will he believe now ?"

"*Dare* he ?" asked George, holding back the sweet face, and looking at it passionately. "Maria, he will ; he does. Be it his bliss or bane, his salvation or his ruin, he will love you—will believe that you love him !"

Under this assurance Maria soon recovered her usual bright and tender gaiety, and became once more perfectly enchanting. After a time she rose, laughingly looked out into the street, and said—

"My poor friend, to-morrow you must labour ; to-morrow you must be away from me. See how fair the night is, even if cold. Come, let us hence, and enjoy it. I long to see the gardens I have told you of with you. I have never seen them, nor danced, nor feasted there with one I loved. Oh, I shall go wild with pleasure ; and so shall you, my poor toiler, my weary one. Come, come !"

He went, and before they again returned to her



lodging, late in the night, she had drawn out of him sufficient knowledge of the inner life of the old house on the bridge to be morally sure Daniel Sterne was no other than General Langton.

They returned to Maria's room which was warm and bright, and sat together there till the early dawn. George with head and heart throbbing with feverish, unquiet happiness; Maria, strangely unlike herself, no longer imperious and gay, but thoughtful, tearful, silent.

The change was delicious to George, whose instinct seemed to tell him she was in love at last, and feeling earnestly all that real love teaches.

When he rose to go she made no effort to detain him but went hastily to a table, and, kneeling, wrote a few hurried lines.

Her face was flushed, her eyes feverishly bright, the whole expression of her features different from anything George had seen in her before, as she came to him and handed the paper.

"Read that—ask no questions—but fly to deliver it; and deliver us both from a more fearful danger than any we have *either of us*, aye, *either of us* contemplated before. George, I have made—and this hour only—a terrible discovery—I love you! She stopped, burst into a passion of hysteric tears, but

would not again allow him to embrace her till he had read the blurred writing in his hand.

It was addressed to Mr. Daniel Sterne, and had inside simply these words :—

Fly ! You are in extreme danger.

A WELL-WISHER, BUT EVIL-DOER.

“Who is he ?” asked George, with a look of terror.

“For your own sake, ask no questions, I conjure you.”

But ere they parted, George knew all. The seller of silk, the man whose life he had saved from the wrecker, was no other than the famous General Viscount Langton ; who had been proclaimed, and for whose discovery a thousand pounds reward was offered.

George needed no more. He turned, and was about to depart without a word or a look ; but her voice so pathetic, hopeless, and yet entreating, as she called, “George,” brought him back.

“Maria, I will not deceive you : we part now for ever.”

“Yes ; I expected so. It is always the same !”

“What is always the same ?” he asked.

“Why, I never try to turn from the evil of my ways, and lead a better life, but I am instantly made a thousand times more miserable.” And then the

wretched creature began to cry so piteously that George felt he must be gone at once, or stay in effect for ever. He kissed her—and fled.

Within an hour he was standing in his bed-chamber, the note from Maria in the General's hands, and making full confession of all his folly, credulity, and recklessness, to the man who might have been, nay, might yet be, their victim.

The General seemed more pleased than shocked at the young man's behaviour through all the seriousness with which he listened. He reassured him as to the danger, which he thought would soon blow over; restored him in some degree to his self-respect by his kindness and generosity; and then, telling him to inform the Mercer he was going for a few days on his business as a diamond-merchant into the country (on strictly private and personal business, he added emphatically), wished George good-bye; and within a quarter of an hour of his receipt of the note, was crossing the bridge, dressed in a long carter's frock, whip in hand, and whistling as he went.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE EARL'S GARDENS.

It so happened that the General had for some days before his sudden departure been very much engrossed in affairs of his own.

“What were they?” asked the Mercer of himself, anxiously; for he had noticed, in his own secret mind the General’s absence of thought about passing matters, and then suddenly a period of busy and constant occupation. He did not come in when expected at the table; he exhibited strange anxiety on little and seemingly unimportant matters; he became more reserved with Christina and the Mercer; and then all at once he disappeared, with no other explanation than that he might be away for some days.

“The madman!” exclaimed the Mercer to his daughter, when he heard of this; “the madman! He is going to work, after all, at this precious business of rebellion, civil war, murder, and anarchy! God protect me and you, Teena, for having harboured him!”

Christina remonstrated, and said she felt sure that he would not do this without taking some important step to guard his friend from even the suspicion of connivance.

The Mercer listened, but refused to be comforted. He knew better than his daughter what ferocious, blood-thirsty stuff Governments were then made of; and how the merest thought of intended attacks on the dynasty would paralyse all generosity, all humane emotions.

But had the General been really leaving his friend for such purposes?

Nothing of the kind. He had been simply endeavouring to discover whether or no Hermia was still in London, and at last had learned that she was not; but that she and her father had both gone to Leigh Court, Yorkshire; having learnt thus much, the General returned to the house on the bridge; and, by his aspect, words, and behaviour, satisfied the Mercer he had not failed in the remotest degree to keep his pledged word.

Then came a second departure, and George's message from the General, which left Sir Richard tolerably well satisfied.

The Earl's gardens, at Leigh Court, have to-night an unwonted visitor in the person of a strange-looking man—tall, stately, ghost-like, as he

moves about, half shrouded in the twilight, and the shade of the trees.

The stateliness of his walk does not, however, disguise the extreme precaution with which he moves along the dark walks and alleys—choosing always the darkest, and those in which the thick vegetation offers the greatest facility for a step aside into their dense covert; and being, evidently, familiar with them all.

At last, as he approaches the end of the walk, his step rises and falls so silently that, did any one notice his coming, they must fancy it a disembodied spectre: the flowing garb, the half light, the hour, the gliding movement, and the absolute soundlessness of his step are so remarkable.

The walk begins to grow less wooded at the sides, and presently he sees before him a double row of magnificent evergreen shrubs, trained to look like noble orange trees; and though they come gliding, with step and gesture almost as supernatural as his own, a lady.

His very heart seems suddenly to refuse to beat, as he asks himself the question—

“Hermia? Is it?”

Yes; he recognises the peculiar mingling of the graceful and the stately which had so forcibly struck him at the theatre, before he knew who it was.

What shall he do?

Surely he has thought all that out before coming here ?

Yet, if so, why is he thrown into such confusion ? He stops, half turns, as if fearing she might enter the walk where he is ; then, moving irresolutely to one side, where there is a thick and tall hawthorn, he stands under its close dark branches (which have been hollowed out to give room, and to make a canopy), as if to watch.

She advances towards him. Can she have seen him ?

He again advances towards her, wondering at what moment she will notice him, and whether she will be alarmed.

Both pause, while he even yet is uncertain whether she has seen him—or, at least, he would be, but that she has made no start, shown no sign of fear ; therefore, he concludes, knows not of his presence.

Why this pause ?

It was on account of a new incident. At the same moment both had heard voices, not far off, engaged in earnest, low, but seemingly animated discourse, so continuous was the buzz.

Lady Hermia goes back to the terrace, and to a seat in a secluded corner, where the passers-by are not likely to see her, or she to be disturbed by them.

General Langton, after listening intently for a

moment, to learn the direction of their approach, steals round the hawthorn, choosing the side nearest to Lady Hermia, and there he waits—anxiously, but hopefully.

Hopefully? Yes. Before everything else, he wants to know what is the position of things here—what his wife is thinking of—what doing; what schemes her father has in his busy brain; and also her brother. Above all, he wants to know whether his wife is, as he fears, devoted to the new dynasty, and therefore quite unprepared to sympathise with him in the fulfilment of his dangerous mission. Some at least of these questions he hopes now to clear up.

That most sad, most fatal contingency—his wife looking on him as a rebel and traitor—had not till quite recently occurred to him; but now that he was obliged to think of it, it appeared truly appalling.

The Mercer, in spite of his reticence as to all that had passed in his interview with Lady Hermia, had not been able to conceal from General Langton in the latter's subsequent and seemingly casual inquiries that she was hostile to all Jacobite schemes.

Well, he is here now, and he will discover the truth if he can, however bad it may be, before he commits himself too far to retreat. May he not have to face a woman who is not only politically



hostile, but who has even been nourished in hatred of himself?

The voices come nearer. Will he be able to distinguish what they say?

One is much louder, sounds like the voice of a younger man, and is altogether more frank than the other. But it is the one which is the least heard that General Langton listens to the most eagerly.

It is—so he believes—the Earl of Bridgeminster, the father of Lady Hermia.

But who is the younger man? Some instinct, before he can hear any one complete sentence, warns the General against that younger man. Had such a contingency been possible under the circumstances, his heart would have whispered him, “this is a lover of Lady Hermia and he is now pressing his suit.”

And though—knowing what he did—such a thought was even then quite inadmissible, an inexplicable feeling of jealousy, of anger, of roused pride, and almost of violence rose in his mind; and had to be calmed by an effort of self-control before he could satisfy himself he was in a fit condition to listen to the talk that now became quite easy to follow.

“As to your rank, Sir Charles,” said the elder figure, a grave-looking personage, who walked very slowly and seemed glad to take the arm of his com-

panion, "as to your rank, that's but a slight difficulty. My services to the king entitle me, at any moment, to ask that my son-in-law be ennobled. Your family is as ancient—I may say more ancient—than my own; and independently of political motives the proximity of our estates makes an alliance valuable to both, so I see no need for your scruples in that matter."

The "proximity" of their "estates," enabled General Langton at once to identify "Sir Charles" with Sir Charles Mordaunt, a neighbouring landowner of great wealth.

"Then, my lord," said the younger man—who seemed to the General not very young either; he guessed him between forty and fifty, but, of course, was quite unable even to guess with any accuracy under the half darkness—"we go back to the old question—Is there any hope for me?"

"What think you, yourself?"

"You mean as regards Lady Hermia?" said Sir Charles, with a certain sharpness of tone.

"Yes," was the quiet reply.

General Langton noticed from behind the tree that the two men had stopped, as if simultaneously to look in each other's face, and wait for the issue of this question.

Sir Charles paused, and began to play with the cane he held in his hand, striking with it at the

gravel, and sending fragments flying right into the General's face, whose blood started to his brow as if it had been an intentional insult.

"Well, my lord, if I were a [young man, I might prefer to delude myself, and say, 'I spy some hope—that I must wait, take time, be patient, and so on.' But not being a young man, I prefer to deal with realities. I regret to say, then, that Lady Hermia's conduct and attitude towards me has been specially marked, and specially unfavourable."

"Ha! how is that?" demanded the Earl of Bridgeminster. And the tone boded ill for Lady Hermia's peace of mind, if she was in any way inclined to have a will of her own.

So thought General Langton, behind the hawthorn tree; even while, with a bitter laugh, he felt growing in his heart a spirit of defiance for the earl, and for all his base machinations.

"I will tell you, my lord, with entire candour. At first—or rather, I should say, not at first, but after I had cautiously avoided everything like the appearance of a personal aim or object, and made her see I did so—I got on very well. We became really intimate. I found her in a state of profound melancholy, and the voice of a friend seemed to bring her to a new life. We read together, walked together, rode together, and it was only when I thought I had established a safe position, and began

to drop a word or two—very quiet ones, I assure you—that she made me see what a fool's paradise I had been in, by a look, a stern word, and then prompt withdrawal out of my way. Since then I have, I own, scarcely cared to pursue the matter further."

"I thank you, Sir Charles, for this very kind, very frank explanation. Now listen to me. You still wish the marriage, if it can be brought about?"

"Most certainly—most anxiously—most determinedly."

"And you are not like many weak men of my acquaintance—scared by trifles?"

"What may you call trifles, my lord?"

"Suppose she said she didn't care for you—never should care for you! Have you so little knowledge of women's ways, so little confidence in yourself, that you would, for such a woman's reason, throw up a match which unites our houses, our wealth—makes them, thus united, irresistible in the Government, and places your children in the very first rank of English nobles, able to command even a dukedom? With such vast wealth, and such a political position as I now myself can secure with your co-operation, would you resign all that for the sake of a woman's morbid fancies?"

"Do you ask me whether, if she would marry me—but only after speaking as—as you have spoken

about our mutual relations—whether I would then marry or resign her?”

“I do ask you that.”

The voices had been growing so indistinct, during the last few sentences—for the speakers had resumed their walk, and had turned to go back the way they came—that the General was obliged to move and follow them, and he greatly dreaded he should lose the answer. He stole from his covert, glided along a few yards in the same direction as themselves, and then stopped, just in time to hear all he needed to hear.

“What do you say?” demanded the Earl of Bridgeminster. “I perceive you hesitate. That is well. But now?”

“Well, my lord, I don’t want to mislead you, nor land myself in a false position. You open a serious vista. I have been looking down it, to see whither it goes—what it leads to. However, life teaches this, if it teaches anything—the necessity for wise men to compromise. I do Lady Hermia, I am sure, only simple justice, when I say she would never compromise my honour.”

“Sir Charles!” gasped the earl, as if stung by an adder. And again he stopped, as if in violent indignation.

“My lord, I honour your feeling, and I have the profoundest possible respect for your beautiful

daughter ; but if you put things to me in a business-like way, I must return them to you in a corresponding fashion. In brief, I am satisfied. If the Lady Hermia will marry me, I shall esteem myself the most fortunate of men, and I shall wait patiently for her love after marriage. Her respect I have already !”

The earl's anger passed away as suddenly as it had come.

“ I am truly glad of this, Sir Charles,” he said, “ for now I can open my whole heart to you, and explain matters that must at times have appeared exceedingly incomprehensible. Why has my daughter, with her rank, wealth, beauty, and intellect, had so few lovers ? That question at once merges into another—Why has she always refused to have any lovers ? For that is the simple truth. No gentleman has ever been near her long, and ventured to try to draw nearer, without the same kind of repulse that you have experienced.”

“ What does it mean ? ”

“ Ah, Sir Charles, I am about to tell you a great secret—one only known to two or three living persons. You know well enough there was a time when all English statesmen were obliged to live in perpetual anxiety as to the future of the English crown, the issue just then seemed so uncertain. At that time I, who held office under the Stuarts, found

myself—for—for reasons I need not now go into—suspected of being no longer devoted to the old cause, and even believed to be preparing to overthrow it with a new family. The moment was critical. I saw how to turn it to advantage; and, in brief, allied myself, with the knowledge of King James (then Duke of York) to one of his most devoted and trusted adherents. I thus became once more possessed of his confidence, and never lost it till—well, till,” said the earl, with a laugh, “we all became rebels together, in order to let in his present most sacred Majesty, whom God preserve! And now, Sir Charles, I am going to surprise you. My daughter, while a child of eleven years of age, was married secretly to the son of James, afterwards Viscount Langton, the boy being then but fifteen!”

“Is it possible!” exclaimed Sir Charles.

“It is, unhappily, true,” responded the earl.

“Then is the present Lord Langton actually the husband of the Lady Hermia?”

“In a sense he is. Listen, my dear friend. You know, as a question of history, when I found it necessary to change my politics. I am not going to excuse the change in any way. I glory in it. I assert it was the most patriotic thing I could do to make such a change, and to make it suddenly and sweepingly, the instant I became convinced change was necessary at all.

"Yes, I accepted the office that had been previously offered me, transferred my loyal devotion from King James to King William, and I have had my reward—not in my sovereign's gratitude only, but in the growing contentment and peace of the State!

"You can, my dear Sir Charles, understand all the rest. The children, of course, were not permitted to meet for some years, and then they were as effectually divided as if some raging sea lay between them. The Langtons hated me, and did their best to blacken my character and motives throughout Europe. I did not love them, after the great change I have spoken of, and after I had heard their comments upon it. See, now, my daughter's position! She knows nothing of this man, cannot possibly have any personal affection for him, hates his cause—thank God for that!—but is weak enough to cherish towards him morbid and sickly ideas of devotion, fidelity, and so on, merely on account of that fantastic, foolish ceremony."

"This is, indeed," said Sir Charles, "an awful revelation. I confess I do not understand you at all. What possible solution favourable to me can you be meditating? I see none."

"Indeed! Let me whisper, Sir Charles, that I think I see many solutions. At present I shall speak of only these:—the tender age of the chil-



dren ; the uncertainty of our marriage law when its history is carefully gone into *with a view to our own wants and objects* ; and above all, the fact that the Langtons are Catholics, while we are Protestants ! ”

“ Ay, but, my lord, let me ask you one question. Do you conceive that any of these solutions are practicable without the consent and co-operation of the Lady Hermia ? ”

“ You touch me nearly there, I confess. I think it just possible the marriage might be annulled in spite of her ; but I own I am not prepared to go so far. No ; we must do it with her consent or not at all.”

“ And by what influences ? ”

“ Her dislike of his cause—her perception that she cannot accept him as her husband without breaking for ever with us—and above all, the moral certainty I now have, and which I have made her share, that he is taking the exact step that will most surely ruin him in her estimation—that is, by again raising the detestable banner of civil war. He is in England at this moment—has for the moment escaped observation—may even now be waiting for his opportunity to seek an interview with my daughter ! ”

“ Are you keeping close watch ? ”

“ I am ; close as it is possible to keep without exposing my secret wishes and thoughts to my

daughter or my dependants here. I am leaving all to Earnshaw, my valet, a shrewd fellow, who keeps a sharp look out."

"And if he be caught—what then?"

"Death—an obscure death—I hope and believe, before he reaches a prison. I have planned all things to secure that end."

"And if not?"

"If not," said the earl, slowly repeating the words, as if he took a kind of luxurious enjoyment in them, "if not—then the Tower—Westminster Hall—back again to the Tower—and there the bright axe—the short shrift, and—the traitor's grave! Farewell, General Lord Langton!"

If the listening Lord Langton had needed any fresh evidence of the almost devilish malignity with which he was viewed by his noble father-in-law, he had it now. There was quite a joyousness in the tones of the aged earl's voice—his step danced with a certain elasticity of spirit—and the "Farewell, Lord Langton!" came at the close with a sense of delicious rest and contentment.

Lord Langton shuddered; not at his own danger, but at the glimpse he had had into the heart of one of the most ancient, infamous, and, yet so to say, "illustrious" of English statesmen.

Then he turned to seek once more Lady Hermia, while reviewing and marshalling in order all the

many, and for him painful and suggestive, facts he had just heard.

She was no longer on the terrace; she had probably gone back to the house. Could he dare, even in his slight disguise, to seek her there?

He must, and quickly. He had only time to shape the method. How?—how?

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE DIAMOND MERCHANT.

By what art or audacity had Lord Langton managed to be where we have seen him—that is to say, in the very pleasure-grounds of Leigh Court, and in the most private parts of those grounds?

Simply through a little tact, the expenditure of a little money, and a good deal of secret determination that he would be there, no matter at what cost, added to his own partial recollections, of the place.

He had thus managed it. Presenting himself to one of the lackeys—a footman, whose face he rather liked—he asked whether it was possible for a stranger to get a glimpse of the beautiful gardens, which he had heard of when at the other end of Europe.

“Unpossible! Quite unpossible!” was the servant’s reply. “The family’s all here, and they won’t allow nobody to come anigh ’em.”

“Ah, well, I’m sorry,” said the stranger, looking wistfully towards the little gate close by, which the servants alone used, and at the same time putting a half-crown into the man’s hand. “I’m very sorry,”

he added, while his fingers jingled the money in his pocket. And the lackey thought he heard gold clinking.

So thinking, how could he help but wonder whether the stranger was rich enough, and generous enough, to give him a piece of that gold if he had been inclined—which he wasn't; oh, no!—to have let him in?

And then, somehow, before he had quite decided the question in his own thoughts, the stranger had decided it for him, by saying—

“Come, I see you are a good fellow. I shouldn't like to go back to where I came from and say I had failed to see the ‘Earl's Gardens,’ as I find they are called in the neighbourhood, on account, I suppose, of their extreme beauty and costliness. So, look you, here's a guinea for you. Let me in at that gate, show me how I can get out without having to look for you, and I'll promise you no one shall see me. I'll keep in the retired walks, and draw back the moment I see man, woman, or child approaching.”

“Well, I don't like to refuse; but mind, I might lose my place if you make a mess of it.”

“I'll take care, trust me,” responded the General.

And so it was settled. The footman showed the visitor that he could, from the inside, undo the fastening; and then, when he drew the gate close after him, it would remain fast.

This occurred early in the afternoon. An hour or so later the servant strolled in the direction of the gate, to see if his acquaintance had gone, or if he was still hanging about. He saw nothing of him.

But later still, when it was getting quite dark, and just after Lady Hermia had come past him into the castle, through the terrace door, and her father and his friend had followed in a few minutes by the same entrance, the lackey was surprised and alarmed to see the stranger actually walk up to him—as if he, too, had come from the same direction as the earl, the earl's friend, and Lady Hermia, and meant to follow them in.

He stared a moment at him, as if astounded at his impudence, and then grew white in the face—angry and insolent.

“I say! What's this? How dare you, sir, come this way into the castle?”

“My good friend, don't be alarmed! I shall soon explain. I came here, as I told you, to see the gardens; and I was going away when I happened to overhear some gentlemen say the Lady Hermia was here.”

“Well, what's that to you?”

“I will tell you, and you will see that it will be something to *you*. I am a diamond merchant; and, as a man of business, always have my eye on business, even in the midst of pleasure.

"Now, hark you ! Let me whisper in your ear. If I make any sales, you'll have two-and-a-half per cent. ; and *my* sales, I can tell you, amount to something."

"Eh ! Do they ? Well, come. I liked the look of you before, and if that's your scheme, I can help you. I'm a little sweet on her maid. Slap-up creature, I can tell you ! Lots of savings—splendid wages. All Lady Hermia's cast-off brocades, and silks, and so on ; and we mean to make a match some day. But I aint in a hurry. She is ! That makes me laugh. I enjoy the fun. Well, I'll go to her, and see if she can manage to persuade Lady Hermia to see you."

"That is the very thing."

"Your diamonds—are they very tip-top—finest water, and all that sort of thing ? "

"They belonged to one of the proudest of English families, and a family that I have heard Lady Hermia took some interest in. It is even possible she might know some of the jewels, as they are of rare beauty ; though I myself am from the Continent—from France, latterly. Tell her so."

"Oh, I'll tell the maid all that, and she'll make still more of the story. Wait you here. I don't think I'd tell my business, if I could help it, to the earl ; for he hates the very sight of strangers, and would make a row if he caught me talking to you like this."

“Do what you like with me! Put me where you will!”

“Would you mind going into the servants’ hall, and saying you’re an acquaintance of mine? Nobody goes there. That’s our castle—inside the castle, as we say—and we allow no interlopers; leastways, none of our betters are ever expected to come there, and they know it, and don’t come.”

“My friend, I am delighted at your good sense, spirit, and wit. What is your name?”

“Halgernon Shrubsole.”

“Algernon Shrubsole! Thanks. Haste, then, my worthy Algernon. Stay! Here’s a bit of calculation for you. If I sell to the extent of a thousand pounds, two-and-a-half per cent. will be just twenty-five pounds for you. If I don’t sell, but get a good chance of selling, by not being disturbed, I’ll give you a second guinea all the same, and wish myself better luck next time.”

Delighted with his visitor, the flunkey went off to seek Jemima Seager, the maid, poured the whole story into her ear, and found her strangely puzzled and thoughtful afterwards.

Whatever her thoughts she did not confide them to her professed lover, but went to seek the Lady Hermia, after saying to Algernon—

“I’m sure she won’t see him. Is it likely? Not but that she wants some jewels for special purposes,



to complete sets and things of that kind ; for ever since that robbery when all her jewels were carried off, and the thieves caught just when they had begun to pull the ornaments to pieces, and some of them were lost—ever since that she's often been talking to me about trying to replace the missing gems ; so if this stranger can help that way she might buy. Ah, well ! I don't think she'll see him."

Algernon went back for a moment to tell his new friend he feared he would be disappointed, and then returned to wait for Jemima and her answer.

She was impatiently looking for him.

"My lady will see this man, if you are sure he's a decent, respectable person, who won't annoy her. She likes to meet people from abroad. She wouldn't have seen him but for my mentioning that. Come, do make haste ! Hark ! Don't you hear her bell ?"

When the diamond merchant received the message he seemed to bow his head for a moment, as if in deep respect, while he was only thinking to himself—

"Now, now ! Beware, beware ! I come not now for any purposes but these—to see her—speak to her—judge of her—and, if possible, warn her of what I have heard, without her suspecting me ! Beyond that I must not go."

With sedate step, erect form, proud look, as if he

expected every instant to confront the earl her father, he followed the lackey, who tried to talk, but found his new friend as suddenly silent and inaccessible as if he had ascended a thousand miles above him.

At the threshold of the door he paused for an instant, seemingly to allow the footman to precede him for a few steps, but really to take one long deep breath, and summon one last stern resolve not at present, under any temptation, to let Lady Hermia know who he was. Then he entered, and stood before a great screen that shut off the blazing fire on the hearth.

A superb bay, divided into centre and two sides, occupied the whole end of the room opposite the end where Lord Langton entered. Coloured coats of arms here and there sparkled like delicate jewels in the growing light of the moon. The glass chandelier, in the centre of the lofty and beautiful apartment, was lighted, but the curtains of the windows were not drawn. Lady Hermia had been sitting, as was her custom, in that bay, watching hour after hour the waning light of the sun and the waxing light of the moon, and not leaving it, even when the servants came to light the chandelier.

She was thus sitting, in the seat of the bay, when Lord Langton entered, an Indian shawl wrapped round her shoulders, her elbow resting on the sill, her eyes gazing through the casement towards a

distant part of the sky, where a single star had emerged some time before the appearance of the moon, as if to mark the close of the beautiful day, while revealing the coming night that was to compensate for the lost beauty by a successor as beautiful. On that star her eyes had long been fixed; and so engrossed was she with it that she had scarcely even noticed the radiance of the larger luminary that had been gradually filling the glades of the park with its tender light.

The merchant had bowed profoundly the moment he entered the room, then after a pause he advanced till he reached, and even passed, the chandelier, for Lady Hermia merely moved a step or two towards him, and then stopped—perhaps, because of his markedly prompt advance.

Whatever the motive of this movement, the effect was that the light of the chandelier was behind the merchant, and directly in front of the Lady Hermia. He saw her well, she saw him only indistinctly.

The first words General Langton heard were at once satisfactory and unpleasant.

“Seager,” said Lady Hermia to her maid, “you can stay.”

This was satisfactory as tending to fortify the General in his resolve to remain unknown; but decidedly unpleasant, as suggestive of special diffi-

culties in having to suit whatever he had to say to two hearers so absolutely unlike one another in every respect as Lady Hermia and her maid.

The General took a morocco case, which, during the last few days, he had caused to be made in the fashion of a jewel-seller's, and said—

“If your ladyship will permit me!” and went to a little occasional table that stood near, lifted it gently, and with so much of the air of a nobleman doing an act of courtesy to a queen, that the maid became more thoughtful than ever about this said diamond merchant. As to Lady Hermia, she, too, noticed the graceful dignity with which the slight act was performed; but concluded it was merely a sign of that superiority which foreigners so often exhibited over her own countrymen in such matters.

“I do not know,” began Lady Hermia, in a tone that was, in spite of its strength and dignity, tinged with so deep a melancholy as to invest her speech with a kind of pathetic music, “that I need anything in your way; but you are a stranger. I hear you have come from abroad, and we live here so far out of the world that your visit to us must have inconvenienced you. At all events, you will permit me to offer you the hospitality of the castle for the night.”

“Oh! no, your ladyship!” And the tone of those few words had a striking harmony with that

which had just been heard. "I—I am deeply obliged, but it is impossible. Business, my lady, is a hard master. I must be far from here before I sleep."

He then, noticing her eyes gravely and earnestly fixed on him, lowered his head to the little table, and began to spread out the jewels he had to offer.

"My maid tells me you have purchased some of these from an English family of distinction, and that it was possible I might know them. What family was it she referred to?"

"Lord Langton's," said the merchant, almost curtly.

For a moment there was no response, but when Lady Hermia spoke again she found it impossible, even after that pause, to conceal the agitation she had experienced, and which was so palpable in the tremulousness of her voice as she went on:—

"Lord Langton's! Indeed! Show me! Which of them, pray?"

Selecting four or five of the very finest and largest gems, the merchant pushed them with his fingers a little apart, and said, simply—

"These!"

She took them up one by one, looked at them as she had never in her life before looked at any such worldly treasures, and when she had thus examined and laid down the last, she drew a long breath, and

seemed struggling to prevent it from being heard by the merchant as a profound sigh.

“And what is the value of these five jewels?”

“Pardon me, your ladyship, if I say, before I mention the price, that I act only as an agent for another; and therefore if the price I have to mention seems to you large, I can only personally regret my inability to deal with the matter according to my own views.”

“Really!” said Lady Hermia; “you are a strange merchant. You frighten your possible customers at the very onset. Surely you came in the hope of achieving some result?”

“Some result, certainly!” said the merchant, in a tone so peculiar that Lady Hermia’s eyes instantly sought his, but he had turned his face from her.

“Well, sir, the price?” she said, a little impatiently.

“Twenty-five thousand pounds!” said the merchant, carelessly.

“Twenty-five—— The man’s mad!” said Lady Hermia, with a laugh.

“He certainly cannot want to part with them, my lady,” said Seager, venturing then for the first time to speak.

“And if divided?” asked Lady Hermia.

“Then, they would necessarily be more,” was the reply.

"This diamond—how much?"

"I will learn from my principal, if he will divide them, and immediately let your ladyship know."

"Then it is clear you do not mean to make a customer of me to-night!" said Lady Hermia; and, as she said this, she shifted her position, and managed to get, for the first time, a good view of the merchant's face.

Its first effect was to make her again draw near to the table, and busy herself in the examination of the gems, in a long and almost embarrassing silence; while the merchant occupied himself by writing memoranda in a note-book.

"You, perhaps, expect to be able to restore these jewels at your own price to the Langtons?" said Lady Hermia, again looking up.

"That is precisely my view—nay, I may say, it is also my wish."

"You know the present Lord Langton personally?"

"Slightly. I have seen him, of course, while obtaining these very valuable jewels, and I have heard much of him."

"Bad or good?"

"I should say bad, if he be measured by his chances and opportunities; good, if estimated by that very vain and illusory thing—aspiration."

"Do you know that he is at present likely to make

everything go in the bad direction, by raising the rebel standard ? ”

“ Does *he* think it the standard of a rebel ? ”

“ I do.”

The clear, ringing, lofty tone in which this was said, the flashing indignation in the beautiful and most brilliant eyes, and the quiet, collected strength and dignity of the attitude of Lady Hermia, were something indescribable.

The merchant bowed, and said no more.

Provoked apparently at his silence, Lady Hermia, after a renewed examination of the jewels, said—

“ So dangerous a character as I find this rebel lord is likely to be ought to be known. Can you describe him to me ? ”

“ I fear not, your ladyship—not well. I am ill at operations of this kind. I am no poet, no novelist, no artist—only a plain diamond merchant.”

“ Is he tall or short ? ”

“ About my height, I imagine.”

“ Stout or spare ? ”

“ Neither.”

“ Oh, the happy man ! ”

Was this said in sarcasm ? The diamond merchant could not help giving Lady Hermia one of those eager, searching glances, which she had already detected on its road more than once.

“ The face dark or fair ? ”



“Fair.”

“Fair!” This was said not only with surprise, but, the merchant fancied, half in disappointment. “You mean, perhaps, scarcely so dark as your own?”

The merchant smiled, as he answered—

“Oh, my lady, I am considered, I believe, very dark. Lord Langton is just as decidedly fair. But I must no longer encroach on your ladyship’s time and patience. I beg to express for this favour my profound gratitude; and if I may not hope to conclude a bargain for the jewels on the terms——”

“The terms!” interrupted Lady Hermia. “Why, you would ruin me! Twenty-five thousand pounds!”

Again Lady Hermia laughed, but this time the laugh was genial, almost kind. Her looks and attitude were also strangely demonstrative, though in a delicate, refined, lady-like way, of a desire that he would not go so soon.

Seeing, however, he was busy replacing all his diamonds with scrupulous care in their places in the case, she walked to the casement and looked out, and there stood, as if lost in contemplation of the beauty of the night—unless, indeed, it was that she was rather lost in a tangle of hopes and fears that, somehow or other, this diamond merchant had caused to spring up.

Seeing him put the case in his pocket, and aware

that in a second or two more he would be gone, she roused herself to advance once more towards him, and the difference of the tone of her voice as she now spoke was quite marked.

"Do you think it likely you may come across Lord Langton?"

"It is possible, though not at all desirable after what I have heard from your ladyship," said the merchant, avoiding anything like a continuous look at her face.

"Allow me to explain," she continued, "the interest you excited in me by the mention of this unhappy gentleman's name. Many, many years ago, our families were friendly. I have not forgotten that, whatever others may do. And because I have not forgotten it, I ask you—merely as a question of good feeling, of—of—humanity—to warn Lord Langton that his present course must lead to irretrievable ruin, whereas—whereas I—I think he might, perhaps, succeed, by time and patience, in making his peace with the powers that be. That is what I wanted to say to him through you, or any friend of his."

"Friend, Lady Hermia! diamond merchants and proud English noblemen are seldom friends. I sometimes fancy I have no greater enemy in the world than this very lord, about whom your ladyship desires me to be so much interested."

"As you please," said Lady Hermia, drawing herself proudly up. "I see, sir, I did you wrong. You *are* a diamond merchant!"

Delicious was the scorn that Lady Hermia threw into these last words. The diamond merchant, so far from being offended by them, seemed to revel in them. His dark face lighted up; his eyes gleamed with pleasure. He looked at Lady Hermia for the moment as if he were half capable of the impudence of thanking her for her opinion of him.

But darker thoughts succeeded. The previous words of that fatally-significant phrase, "I do!" as expressing her conviction of his being a rebel, rankled in his heart, and overshadowed his whole future; so he turned to her, intending to say his last words, with a stern, though deeply-respectful countenance.

"Should I meet Lord Langton, and tell him what your ladyship has commissioned me to say, I think, from what I have heard, I could guess his answer, and that I might, therefore, almost deliver it in advance."

"Indeed!" said Lady Hermia; and again the sense of mystery revived, as to who this strange man could be.

"He would say, I fancy, that when he undertook, at the desire of the king——"

"Not the king, Mr. Merchant, in this house!" said Lady Hermia.

“Very true, your ladyship ; but I fancy he would call him his king. May I proceed ?”

Lady Hermia gave no answer, but stood aloof, her face half turned away, as if just now she was more engrossed to listen than to look.

“I was saying, your ladyship, that I fancy *he* would say that, when he undertook, at the desire of his king, this desperate mission, he did it knowing all his danger. Nay, worse than that, that he had, at that moment, a mission of his own—a private one—but personally dearer to him a thousand times than the cause of kings and dynasties could be ; that he sacrificed everything—his command in the French army—to be able to obey that call of nature and of God. He told me that, my lady,” said the diamond merchant, pausing, and with an entire change of tone, “when he trusted me with all these jewels.”

“Did he ? Proceed !” murmured Lady Hermia, no longer able to control her agitation.

“Where was I ?” said the diamond merchant with a smile, that was belied by the tremor of his voice. “Oh, I remember ! It’s difficult, of course, for a man like me to throw myself into the feelings and views of a man like Lord Langton.”

“Oh, you do it very well, Mr. Merchant !” said Lady Hermia ; and for a few seconds Mr. Merchant was so much puzzled by the tone, and by his in-

ability to understand its meaning, that he did not obey the invitation to proceed.

At last he managed to say, a little abruptly, almost huskily—

“I was only, I think, going to let him conclude—in what I conceive to be his manner—that no earthly temptation should make him swerve from the fulfilment of his pledge.”

“Yes—yes,” said Lady Hermia; and it was with inexpressible anguish the merchant saw the bright tears standing in those superb eyes. “That is just what I fancied. Ruin in the name of duty! Ruin to himself! Ruin to—— Sir, I wish you a good evening!”

Thus, abruptly checking herself in the middle of a sentence, did Lady Hermia speak. And the pride of a daughter of one of the proudest of the English great families, shone out now in her whole behaviour.

The diamond merchant, however, seemed absolutely indifferent to that which would have paralysed most men.

He ventured to draw nearer to her, to stand upright before her, to gaze steadily in her noble, but stern features, which grew more and more awful in their repellent beauty, as she noticed these things; and, the two thus standing, the merchant spoke his last words after a glance at Seager, whose presence he dared not for an instant forget:—

"Lady Hermia, I know not whether chance has, or has not, befriended me this evening, so as to enable me to render your ladyship some return, however slight, for the great honour done me in this prolonged audience; but here the matter stands:—

"While I wandered in the grounds, a trespasser—having found an open gate—I was accidentally made a party to a conversation between two gentlemen, that struck me as being of a curious nature. To what lady, or to what gentleman, the conversation referred, I am, of course, not in a position to say. But I fancy the lady must be a relative, or, possibly, a friend of yours. By the conversation occurring in the privacy of your own grounds, at all events I can commit no wrong by repeating its substance. Efforts are to be made to obtain a divorce from some marriage, said to be imperfectly carried out, and another gentleman——"

"Did you hear his name?" demanded Lady Hermia, interruptingly.

There was a pause as if for reflection, before the answer came, in these words—

"I almost think I did, though I feel delicate about names. I might as a diamond merchant, so misunderstand these things."

"Yes—the name?"

"Was Sir Charles—— I did not hear the surname. He was to have higher rank; and he was

prepared not to be too scrupulous as to the lady's feelings, provided only, on any terms, she consented. I beg Lady Hermia a thousand pardons for venturing, in my imperfect manner, to repeat such a conversation, and still more anxiously do I hope to be excused for venturing to think the matter of any interest to you. I have the honour to wish your ladyship good night."

"Good-night, good-night!" said Lady Hermia, hurriedly, and as if engrossed with the new theme raised by the diamond merchant's communication. "Seager, show the gentleman out; and see that every hospitality be shown to him that he will permit us to offer. Good-night, Mr. Merchant!"

"Good-night, my lady!"

The merchant and the maid-servant withdrew, and when they were gone, and the door had been closed after them, Lady Hermia began to pace rapidly up and down the room; but presently stopped, looked up, stamped unconsciously with one foot—seemed to strive determinedly, by slight artifices of that kind, to stave off the coming storm. But it could not be staved off. It grew, and blackened, and big drops began to fall: and at last her hand went, with a passionate gesture, to her face, and her head drooped; and then she tasted once more all the intensity of the grief, the disappointment, the despair, natural to the heart of such a woman; who saw now, after her

long period of sadness, that had not been quite destitute of hope, that there really *was* no hope; that her unknown husband was going to be known to all the world but her; and known by deeds which she considered desperately evil, and leading to an end that could only be the scaffold!

The maid fortunately did not return soon. Lady Hermia had time to recover her equanimity, and to rid herself of the traces of tears on her cheeks.

She sat down by the table where the merchant had displayed his gems. There was an extraordinarily beautiful little antique vase of ivory and silver standing upon it. A scrap of paper lay on it, almost covering the mouth of the vase. Lady Hermia's glance no sooner fell upon it, than she divined it had been left by the stranger—a leaf torn out of that note-book in which she had fancied he had been making mere business memoranda.

She took the paper; and found written on it in pencil these words:—

The price of this diamond, which seems to meet Lady Hermia's approbation, shall be made known to her. Till then, the writer begs to leave it in her ladyship's hands, in the hope that the price will not be so heavy as the *agent* has been obliged to ask.

Where was the diamond?

Lady Hermia turned up the vase, and the diamond—one of large size and extreme beauty, rolled out.



The merchant had dropped it there ! Surely the strangest of merchants !

While Lady Hermia gazes on this diamond almost lovingly—even while there is also in her breast a consciousness that she may have to return it rather than pay a price impossible for her to pay without the knowledge of her father—she hears a great clamour in the neighbouring courtyard.

She goes, in alarm, hurriedly along a corridor till she reaches a window, through which she can look into the court. She sees there many of the servants collected, some with arms in their hands, and she sees horses being brought forward.

In breathless anxiety she opens the casement to listen. Two of the retainers are talking just below.

“It must be a queer job ! I’m told to mind the powder’s good, and to keep an eye to my bullets, and that I don’t forget to put them in !”

“Ay, ay, I guess what it’s all about, though mum’s the word.”

“What !”

“I heard in a whisper a certain name mentioned; that explains all.”

“What name ? Can’t you speak out ?”

“Yes, and get my windpipe slit for my pains. However, if you must know, we’re off on a rebel hunt.”

“Rebel hunt.”

“Ay, bully-boy, and the rebel’s Lord Langton!”

In an instant Lady Hermia is back to her own room, and flying distractedly about, not knowing what she is going to do or whither to go, but the cry is in her heart—

“Oh, my husband! Is it thee?—is it thee? Blind wretch that I was! Ought I not to have known it sooner, when I saw thou would’st not sell me thy diamonds? And art thou gone?”

“Oh, my own husband! Now in the very jaws of death! Who shall save thee?”

END OF VOL. ONE.











